





*No. 10 Downing Street*












MR. STANLEY BALDWIN



# No. 10 Downing Street

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## *Preface*

**M**UCH has been written about the many famous men who have lived in No. 10 Downing Street since the year 1735, the period when the old house first became the home of British Premiers, but the story of the building itself seems to have been largely ignored. Consequently, the purpose of this book is to tell of the astonishing and romantic vicissitudes through which have passed the bricks and mortar upon which the visitor to Downing Street looks to-day.

Two hundred eventful years have made No. 10 feared and famous throughout the world. They have caused a somewhat ugly house to become of greater significance in peace and war than the homes of kings or dictators. But, great as has been their importance in the history of government, they have borne only a part in shaping the atmosphere of modern Downing Street. For No. 10's traditions of government may date back into very ancient times. As an instance of this, some authorities hold that nearby Tothill was raised by the Druids and used as a Gorsedd Mound whence the laws were delivered and administered. Again, it is more generally believed that in Roman times the Downing Street site and its immediate neighbourhood became of considerable importance.

King Edward the Confessor was a visitor to the spot at the time of the building of the first important church on the ground where Westminster Abbey now stands. Moreover, it is probable that in the foundations, and even in the walls of the No. 10 of to-day, are stones which once formed part of an older house, which stood upon the same ground, and from which Sir Thomas Knyvett, afterwards Baron Escrik, left secretly to arrest Guy Fawkes. Thus an account of No. 10 which opened in 1735 would be entirely inadequate.

However, here it should be stated definitely that, despite the extensive research that has been carried out by eminent men, very little is known for certain about the story of ancient London. From the facts that have been ascertained, authority A will draw one conclusion and authority B another. Thus the account given in this book of very early days in the Downing Street neighbourhood is the result of careful analysis of various theories concerning the Westminster district. While little regarding these long gone days can be stated as certain, no effort has been spared by the authors in arriving at what seems to be the most reasonable and likely story. Those who are not in entire agreement with the deductions that have been drawn in the following pages doubtless will be tolerant of others' views, knowing that their own have not and, indeed, are never likely to be proved.

In seeking to trace the story back into ancient

times the research worker is faced with seemingly endless difficulties. A hoard of intricate material needs continual sifting and sorting. Time and again as the pattern develops, threads which at first seemed to have their proper places in the design turn out to be broken and faulty. It is these threads, misleading clues that seem to promise information and then lose their way in a tangle of confusion, that add tremendously to the task. The further back the writer seeks, the worse his problems grow. There are great gaps of time during which minor events went unchronicled, and as has been indicated, the widely divergent deductions made from scanty material by eminent historians of the neighbourhood still further complicate the task. It is fascinating, however, to weave together, thread by thread, the lines of information that lead from numerous ancient tomes and many more modern sources to the historic No. 10 of to-day. But when research is finished, all that can be claimed is that care has been observed in arriving at what seems to the authors to be the most probable picture, for, as has been already stated, it often happens that no two authorities agree on important points, each of which may affect the history of a hundred years.

No. 10 is a much altered house. There have been few periods in its history when it was not found necessary to effect repairs or alterations of one kind or another. Indeed, the urchins of the river-front, singing the old song about London Bridge, with

greater justice would have sung "No. 10 is falling down." Many Premiers have found the poor condition of the house a sore inconvenience.

In Cleland's *Memoirs of Pitt*, 1807, the great statesman is reported to have mentioned on June 17th, 1783, "the expense of repairing the house in Downing Street, in which he had the honour to be lodged for a few months. The repairs of that house only, had, he said, but the year or two before he came into office, cost the public 10,000*l.* and upwards; and for the seven years preceding that repair, the annual expenses had been little less than 500*l.* The alterations that had cost 10,000*l.* he stated to consist of a new kitchen and offices, extremely convenient, with several comfortable lodging rooms; and he observed, that a great part of the cost, he had understood, was occasioned by the foundations of the house proving bad. . . ."

No. 10's story has been far more eventful and dramatic than that of most houses; its present is full of significance, for it is the power behind the League of Nations. What of its future? Fortunately, circumstances are not at present favourable for the intense political earthquake necessary to bring somewhat unorthodox leaders into prominence. There are, however, many pessimistic persons both within Parliament and outside it who would have us believe that the trend of affairs will eventually move the sober-minded Englishman to the point of national folly and disruption.

Not long ago the present authors met a mutual friend from Canada, a strong Imperialist and a man of shrewd perceptions, who also has an imaginative mind and a facile tongue. Unfortunately, his imagination is sometimes gloomy. He stood, feet wide apart, in Downing Street before No. 10. He stared at the grey building, and the windows from which people seem to look out so seldom. Presently he spoke. "I know something of the past of that old house. Now I'm picturing its future." His eyes had gone blank and it was clear that he did not see the historic door-knocker at which he stared.

"This Socialism business," he continued, "may make a difference in the future. They're good fellows, most of them—all I've met, anyway. But they'll have to take care that they don't let their ideas run away with them, like Mussolini. If they do, No. 10'll be having a queer tenant one of these days—not at all of the kind they themselves want. I can see him now, coming out of the door yonder. He is short, squat and broad-shouldered. His arms hang loosely at his sides with the fingers curved, talon-wise, as if eager to grasp the throat of an adversary. And, although he does not know, it is Britain he has throttled, in the name of Liberty. His features are insignificant, with the exception of his eyes which have a piercing, almost mesmeric quality.

"This is the man who will have played skittles with your established forms of government, outraged more traditions than there are bricks in that old



house, and set us fellows in the Dominions by the ears with the Old Country. Maybe you would think that such a fellow would despise any house less than a palace. But you would be wrong. He is content with power. He has no time or inclination for entertaining, for the amusements of Courts and courtiers, and No. 10 has become little more than an office. With the exception of the State drawing-room and the Cabinet room, in which he presides over meetings with his henchmen, nearly every room in the house has been converted into an office. The books in the Library have been removed to make way for shelves full of files and documents. The great man himself sleeps in what was once a servant's bedroom. Secret meetings, almost of a Star Chamber nature, take place over the refectory table in the pleasant little breakfast-room.

"Then there is the street in which we are standing. That'll be changed, too. To-day anyone who feels like it may stroll down without hindrance, beyond being shepherded to one side when a Cabinet Meeting happens to be assembling. But in these other days Downing Street will be completely blocked at the Whitehall end by a formidable barricade. Here, even members of the household will have to leave their cars and proceed on foot. On the other side of the house a high wall and parapet will have been built to front the Horse Guards, and along this sentries will ceaselessly patrol. Those who rule by force must live in constant fear of reprisals in

kind. Then will come days of disorder. Sentries will be doubled. But this will be to little purpose. A dull day dawns. The city is tense with an electric atmosphere which so far has found no active expression. Presently a publicity van drives round St. James's Park. I can see it now. No one takes any notice of it. Why should they, with its raucous, vulgar loud-speakers, blaring the praises of No. 10's tenant. Suddenly the van swerves across the Horse Guards Parade and pulls up short of the Treasury passage. Out of the confusion of shots that follow the most decisive factor is the bomb which completely wrecks the Cabinet Room where the Great Man and five of his most loyal supporters are in conference."

The man from Canada shook his shoulders and strolled across to look more closely at the historic door-knocker. "Maybe that's all hot air," he said. "I hope it is, because if anything like that were to come true, the only place where Peace is loved and where lies the power to keep it would have lost its influence over a crazy world."

Probably this visitor from overseas does not realise that he himself and his cousins in other Dominions and Colonies constitute the principal factor which will prevent the gloomy picture he conjured from the air of Downing Street, from being translated into anything more real than the stuff of imagination. No. 10 has played the chief part in the birth of the most amazing experiment in empire building that the world has known, and it is likely that the men who

are still to occupy the house will see the magnificent gamble through to success or failure in the spirit in which it was commenced. No. 10, which at one time in its history created a scandal by gambling in stocks and shares, is now gambling an Empire upon the loyalty, common sense and gratitude of men.

To-day the British Empire, of which No. 10 is the nominal political centre, is no Empire at all, in the original intention of the word. Dominion self-government has destroyed the last semblance of central control. The Statute of Westminster has opened an entirely unexplored phase of imperial administration. The British Empire is held together only by the goodwill and mutual trust of the people of its component parts. Without powerful central control the empires of the past world all have collapsed. What would the British Dominions have to say if Westminster tried to follow the precedent set by the Egyptian Pharaohs? The rulers of Egypt would not have believed that an empire resting solely upon the ideal of "common allegiance to the Crown" could have lasted for a year. "The good god" Pharaoh ruled his empire as a despot. Contrary to the principle now practised in the British Empire, Egypt's possessions were exploited ruthlessly for the benefit of the Mother Country. Pharaoh appointed Viziers, who ruled Thebes and Memphis under his own direct commands. Thus the south and the north were subject to central control exercised by the ruler of the day. The Vizier in charge of Nubia

was known as "the King's Son of Kush," and he was responsible only to the Crown. In the same way the views of the reigning Pharaoh were the guiding cause of all the decrees issued by the officials controlling Phœnicia and the Asiatic dominions.

In the Macedonian Empire, Alexander the Great held supreme control. Darius I, the great Persian conqueror, ruled with a powerful central government. Although this ruler made much show of granting a large measure of liberty to his dominions he put an ingenious check upon the power of colonial administrators. He placed the Treasury of his Empire in the hands of an important official, who was directly responsible to himself. Thus Darius was able to crush incipient disobedience in any portion of his realms by withholding financial supplies.

In Rome the principle of an iron central control was regarded as essential to the maintenance of the Empire. It is true that when a city state, Rome was a republic, but she found it necessary to bestow ever-increasing power upon her leaders as her dominions grew. While everything that could be contrived was done to make the people continue to think themselves citizens of a vast republic, the fact was that authority had to be more and more centralised.

Perhaps it was the American War of Independence which gave birth to new ideals of empire in the minds of the British people. However this may be, new ideas have certainly developed and have been expressed through decisions taken within the walls of No. 10

Downing Street. The British Empire to-day offers the world the ideal of a "free association" of nations. Whether or not this high ideal is to be proved practical must depend to some considerable extent upon future events in No. 10.

Downing Street has indeed embarked upon a colossal experiment. It has started well, for already, to the astonishment of the world, the British peoples are engaged in putting into successful practice the opening phases of a departure in government which is a direct negation of the fundamental principle of past imperial Governments—central control.

This volume does not claim to be a history book, nor does it pretend to deal with the subtleties of political stratagem and subterfuge. Indeed, every effort has been made to place history in the background and to discuss important political personages only in so far as some reference to their doings is necessary to a proper understanding of the story of the house. For the purposes of this work the feelings of the Duke of Wellington within the walls of No. 10 are of greater importance than that great General's tactics on Waterloo field.

The old associations of the neighbourhood wherein No. 10 now stands are described as having particular relevance, and while a leaven of politics could not be entirely avoided, the first consideration throughout has been to present the story of No. 10 in as human, unelaborate a manner as possible. The expert on particular periods will understand at once that no one

book could possibly deal adequately with the subject, if it attempted to discuss in elaborate detail the many nice points arising in the various phases of No. 10's development.

Cabinet meetings and cookery—conferences on the fate of nations and over the household accounts—official interviews and private carousals ; all mix and mingle in the story of this extraordinary house, at one and the same time the official sanctum of the First Lord of the Treasury and his private residence. It is not surprising that the house has been the butt of much criticism, both on account of the numerous repairs to which it has been subject and the conduct of its several tenants. Indeed, it is remarkable that it should have withstood the storms of abuse and invective of which it has been the subject from time to time.

Some people may consider that the Premiers are better housed by No. 10's country cousin—Chequers, but few would wish that a new town house should supersede No. 10 as their official residence. The ghosts of former glories and the cloak of romance invest No. 10 Downing Street with a dignity it would take any other house, however imposing, many years to acquire. In time the house may become a National monument, open to the public, and for a few pence the man in the street may be able to inspect the house of great failures and even greater successes. It is sure that, were the Prime Ministers accommodated elsewhere, No. 10 would still be revered, respected—and repaired.

Ruskin said : " Watch an old building with anxious care ; guard it as best you may, and, at any cost, from any influence of dilapidation. Count its stones as you would the jewels of a crown. Set watchers about it, as if at the gate of a besieged city ; bind it together with iron when it loosens ; stay it with timber when it declines. Do not care about the unsightliness of the aid—better a crutch than a lost limb ; and do this tenderly and reverently and continually and many a generation will still be born and pass away beneath its shadow." These words might have been written with No. 10 Downing Street in mind. Certainly they express a sentiment which we should always preserve in relation to the grand old building.

It should perhaps be stated here that while the home of the Premiers did not start as No. 10 Downing Street, having once upon a time possessed another number, it is here described as " No. 10 " throughout for the purpose of clarity.

The authors would like to express their thanks to the many people who have helped them in research which, but for expert assistance, would have been doubly difficult.

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# No. 10 DOWNING STREET

## CHAPTER I

### No. 10 TO-DAY

Expensive tradition—Inside details—The Cabinet Room—The garden—  
The kitchen—Many changes in functions of rooms—Upstairs—  
Tenants and their furniture—Artistic gloom—Souvenir !

**T**HERE can be few houses in Britain which have been altered so frequently or drastically as No. 10 Downing Street. The house has cost more to repair, all told, than three houses would for the building ; but in spite of frequent and virulent criticism it has withstood suggestions from many quarters that a more suitable home should be found for Britain's Prime Ministers. A very lucid idea of the sentimental value of No. 10 to the country is given by an extract from the *Morning Herald* of the 21st June, 1783 :—

“ . . . £500 p.a. preceding the Great Repair, and £11,000 the Great Repair itself ! So much has this extraordinary edifice cost the country—for one moiety of which sum a much better dwelling might have been purchased, even supposing Government to be purchaser.”

The appearance of the house has altered little since the "Great Repair" of the late eighteenth century. It has the same unassuming brick façade.

For those who are not familiar even with the outside of No. 10, some description of the front of the building will have interest. Above an ample basement the house has a window on each side of the front door. Through these windows porters may be seen peering at people who approach the house, on days when a Cabinet Meeting is assembling. There are three windows on each of the two floors above, and three dormer windows in the attic. The house is topped by a slate roof. Passing under a wrought-iron bracket which carries an old-fashioned lantern, the visitor mounts a shallow step to the front door. Hardly will he have lifted the black, lion's-head knocker, than the door will be opened. This knocker, incidentally, has been held in superstitious veneration for many years. During the war many soldiers came to Downing Street to touch the knocker "for luck" before entraining for the Front.

After two hundred years of continual change, the No. 10 we know to-day may be neither comfortable, ornamental, nor imposing. Its every room, however, is steeped in history and tradition. The entrance-hall is one of the very few rooms in the house which has not changed its function in two hundred years. It is plain but pleasant, with little furniture. Foot-square black and white checks is the design of the floor which has in the centre a good, hard-wearing mat,

buff, with a red border. On the right as you enter is a wide fireplace, above which is a handsome sun-ray clock. Beside the fireplace is a porter's black leather, hooded basket-chair. A grandfather clock which used to be a prominent feature of this room was removed not long ago. On the left of the room is a marble-topped table, with somewhat ornate gilt-lacquered legs. Above the table is a mirror. Both these pieces of furniture, and the sun-ray clock as well, are recent acquisitions. On the farther wall are two dim, dark pictures by one Jan Miel, known as Bamboccio. Doubtless these pictures are valuable, but they are not seen at their best in this rather dark room. Until a few years ago, this room was decorated with a number of mounted antlers, the property of Mr. Asquith's son. When they were taken away it was found that most of them had succumbed to decay, a regular visitor to No. 10. On the left of the entrance-hall is the doorway that communicates with No. 11 Downing Street.

Passing through the hall one is confronted with a long passage which leads direct to the Cabinet Room, while on one's right is another passage leading to offices and waiting-rooms. In the corner formed by the meeting of these two passages is the office-keeper's room, partitioned off by glass panels. On the left of the main passage was once a room of cubby-holes for porters and messengers. Nearby a staircase leads to the basement. The cream walls and wide red carpet in this passage carry out the colour-scheme of



the ground-floor of No. 10. This detail may seem a little laborious, but it is necessary to miss nothing that will help to create a clear mental picture of the passage to the Cabinet Room down which have walked many of the most illustrious men in the history of Britain.

In the passage are busts commemorating two of these famous men, one is of William Pitt, the other of Lord Melbourne, who, using the house as an office, never lived in it, though he was its "official tenant." Thirty-five people have actually been tenants of No. 10 during the past two hundred years. Not all of these were "official," but the figure does not include various secretaries who were billeted in No. 10 during the long period when the house was not in fashion as a private residence. In the niche that now accommodates the busts of Pitt and Melbourne was once a bust of Disraeli. Opposite the niche, on the right of the passage, is a lift, a comparatively recent innovation, put in during Campbell-Bannerman's occupation.

At the end of this famous passage is an ante-room which to-day is really no room at all. It would be better described as a hall-way. At one time this spot was indeed a room, but nowadays it is merged into the passage, about a third of the space being sheltered by a large red screen. As he approaches this place the visitor will pass a great old chest, the property of Mr. Baldwin, and at the entrance of the room is an umbrella-stand belonging to Mrs. Baldwin.

The ante-room itself is notable for the lines of pegs which garnish its walls. Below each peg is a card denoting the office, the holder of which is entitled to the use of the peg. The various office-holders are not indicated personally. Next to the door which opens into the Cabinet Room, the first peg is allotted to the Lord Chancellor. Then follow the Lord President of the Council, the Lord Privy Seal and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Set in a niche over the fireplace is the bust of Disraeli, removed from the passage. This bust itself displaced one of Wellington. The floor of the ante-room is covered with plain carpeting, on the centre of which is a table holding a rack of stationery, pens, an inkstand and an ample blotter.

Above the fireplace hangs a large and heavy picture in an ornate frame. One would expect this picture to portray someone who has added notably to the fame of No. 10; but "Portrait of a Man" is the only description vouchsafed. Indeed, nobody knows who the man was. However, the picture seems to belong to the school of Vandyck and it was part of the Wynn Ellis bequest. The fireplace itself is plain, convex, with a tiled curb.

On the left of the entry from the passage is a mahogany grandfather clock. This, the curious will notice, is the work of one Samuel Whichote. Around the walls are many chairs so that nobody, kept waiting while the Premier is engaged, shall be put to the discomfort of kicking his heels. On the farther side

of the fireplace, against the wall, is a long leather-upholstered seat sheltered by the big red screen.

Leading out of this passage-ante-room on the right hand is a landing from which mounts the main staircase. On the walls of this staircase are pictures of all the Prime Ministers since Walpole, the first official occupant of the house. Opposite the foot of the staircase is a room occupied by the Prime Minister's principal Private Secretary. In former days this room was an ante-room. It connects with the Cabinet Room through a set of double-doors, red baize on the side of the Secretary's room and cream on the side of the Cabinet Room.

Entering the Cabinet Room from the Secretary's room, the visitor finds himself before two ornate Corinthian columns which reach from the floor to the ceiling. In the evening the room is lit by plain bowl-shaped pendant lights, a striking contrast to the elaborate candelabra which once gave the room its illumination.

The Cabinet Room is the most historic spot in a house that has itself made history. Even this room has changed its function from time to time. For instance, in the latter part of the eighteenth century it was the Premier's study. Once Mr. Baldwin used this room largely as a study, though later he began to use for this purpose the library on the first floor, a practice followed by Mr. MacDonald.

Occupying the whole of the centre of the Cabinet

Room is the great table which has supported so many famous elbows. It is furnished with neat rows of stationery racks, pens, blotters and glass inkpots. Incidentally, any blotting-paper used at a Cabinet Meeting is destroyed very shortly afterwards, for at one time it was suspected that blotting-paper, used in the Cabinet Room during Conferences at which vital secrets were discussed, was examined afterwards by people having no authority whatever to see it. Nowadays No. 10's blotting-paper is destroyed before it can be held to a mirror and its secrets learnt by some interested but unauthorised person.

The most modern devices in the Cabinet Room are ash-trays and, of course, a telephone on private lines. Under one of the windows which looks out over the Horse Guards Parade is a comfortable leather arm-chair. The leather-upholstered chairs, which stand at the table when a meeting is in progress, are at other times ranged back along the walls. During Imperial Conferences their orderly ranks are broken at intervals by small tables placed for the convenience of delegates.

The fireplace is tiled, with a marble surround, and the mantelpiece carries a plain clock. On either side of the fireplace are large bookcases containing Hansard. Elsewhere in the room are bookcases laden with literature of political and historic interest. Above the fireplace is a picture of Walpole by J. V. Van Loo. This is surely the most suitable place for a picture of the man who not only was the first to occupy No. 10

in an official capacity but also was the originator of the modern Cabinet System.

On the floor of the room is a brick-red carpet of unassuming design. For the rest, the walls are panelled, broken on the west side by a double "window-door" giving access to the terrace above the garden. This exit cannot rightly be called a "French-window" for it does not open as a door. It is an ordinary type of English sash-window, reaching from ceiling to floor. Thus, anyone wishing to pass direct from the Cabinet Room to the garden must bend and duck his head under this extraordinarily inconvenient contraption.

The garden is not particularly attractive. It is reminiscent of a corner in almost any public park and is provided with ugly-looking but comfortable seats. Flowering shrubs are put among the evergreen borders in the summer, but there is only one narrow, inconsequent strip of ground suitable for flowers.

An interesting fact concerning this garden is handed down to us from 1736, when on the 16th "April" the Office of Works appointed one Samuel Milward as gardener at the salary of £40 per annum. This seems a large sum, for those days, as wages for such a light job of work as this small garden provides. The view of the office of Works is clearly given, however, in the following extract from their records :

"A piece of garden ground situate in his Majesty's park of St. James's & belonging & adjoining to the house now inhabited by the

Right Honourable the Chancellor of his Majesty's Exchequer hath been lately made and fitted up at the Charge & Expenditure of the Crown.

"It is necessary & fitting that some skilfull person should be appointed to look after, keep and maintain in good order. . . ."

On Milward's death in 1753 he was succeeded by George Lowe, who had previously been for nearly fifteen years gardener at Hampton Court.

There is one room, contiguous to the Cabinet Room, which has not yet been mentioned. This is usually occupied by a Secretary. It connects with the ante-room at the end of the main corridor. Further rooms on the ground-floor are the messengers' room behind the office-keeper's shelter, three rooms used as offices, and additional rooms for Secretaries. The house resembles a cored apple, for it is built round a well. One would not suspect this fact when looking at the outside of the building. Possibly this well was evolved when the house was first done-up, between the years 1732 and 1735, for the occupation of First Lords of the Treasury. The well is as drab and dismal as any other well in any other building, but it is enlivened here and there, on the upper floors, by window-boxes.

At one place the ground-floor is interrupted by the intrusion of the ceiling of the kitchen, the tallest room in the house. The kitchen is in the basement. It has a vaulted roof like a church, and a great arched window. In the scullery there is a similar window,

the upper part of which reaches through a waiting room on the ground-floor above. High up on the wall of the kitchen is a large clock, and, apart from the great cooking-stoves, tables, chairs, and cupboards around the walls, there is a most remarkable long table down the centre of the room. This table is made from one solid plank, five inches thick. This room has always been used as the kitchen.

The waiting-room into which the kitchen ceiling intrudes in olden days had a very different function. It was used as a laundry, and at one time as a maids' bedroom. The use of this room as a waiting-room is particularly suitable, for it is secluded. It is a plain room, rather dark, with two still darker pictures by way of ornamentation. One is "Showery Weather, Coast Scene" by F. R. Lee, from the Vernon Collection, and the other "A Battle" by Johan Van Huchtenburgh. It is a vaulted, musty, quiet, not unfriendly room. It is lightened by the plain cream walls, which have been a feature of the decoration of No. 10 in recent years.

On the first-floor of the house, directly above the Cabinet Room, is a spacious apartment which has changed its function several times. Nowadays it is used as a boudoir; previously it was used as the Prime Minister's bedroom, and before that it was the official study. In this room Campbell-Bannerman died. Mr. Lloyd George used it as a bedroom; Mr. MacDonald as a study; Mrs. Baldwin has made out of it a sitting-room for herself. It is a pleasant,



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## THE CABINET ROOM

*H.M. Office of Works*





airy room having views over the Horse Guards Parade and St. James's Park. Next to it is the room now used as the Premier's bedroom, directly over the Secretary's room. Next again, at the top of the front stairs and directly over the ante-room at the end of the ground-floor corridor, is a large dressing-room which used to serve as a boudoir. It leads out of the Prime Minister's bedroom, and was turned into a sitting-room by Mrs. Lloyd George. The Prime Minister has a bathroom attached to his bedroom. Out of the room now used as a boudoir folding-doors give on an apartment known in No. 10 as "the small drawing-room." This room is not used for official gatherings. It is next to the official drawing-room, which is the last room on the north side of the house and is contiguous to the Treasury. Below it, next to the Secretary's room on the ground-floor, are the steps which lead up directly into the Treasury.

On the east side of the house, next the official drawing-room, is the breakfast-room, known now in No. 10 as "the small dining-room." This breakfast-room, which comfortably accommodates six at table, would please many visitors, for it is a delightfully simple room. It was designed by Sir John Soane during the alterations which he effected in 1825, and has plain oak-panelled walls. In the centre is a pleasant refectory table. This room is situated over offices, and has a door leading into the main dining-room, "the large dining-room." Thus this dining-room faces over the Treasury Courtyard.

The last, and one of the most interesting rooms on this floor is the library, situated directly over the entrance-hall and facing on to Downing Street. In common with other rooms in the house, it has had varied functions. In recent times Malcolm MacDonald used it as a sitting-room. It has been used as a principal bedroom, and, in Mr. Lloyd George's time, as a spare bedroom. During the Baldwin tenancies it has always been used as a library. But at one time it was a dining-room. Through these windows Lord North and his companions looked out, afterwards anxiously settling themselves round the dinner-table while hooligans with murderous intent filled Downing Street during the Gordon Riots.

When Mr. Baldwin is in occupation prominent features of this room are always its tenant's favourite arm-chair and pipe-rack. In front of the fireplace he places another of his favourite possessions, a thick black-and-red rug. There are no restrictions preventing a tenant from bringing his own carpets and hangings, among other furniture, and the taste of these naturally makes much difference to the brightness and comfort of No. 10.

The Cabinet library, previously blessed with no more edifying literature than many volumes of Hansard, has much benefited from the tenancies of Mr. MacDonald. While Mr. MacDonald was in the house he moved in a number of chairs and desks, also pictures and books. Most of the books, of course, he took away with him on leaving, but not all, for it

has become a custom for an outgoing tenant to present the library in the Cabinet Room with some contribution on the subject of history or politics. Not only did Mr. MacDonald live up to this custom, but, in addition, the happy thought occurred to him that if he left books behind him, so also might his colleagues in the Cabinet. So he suggested that they also should contribute. His suggestion was adopted, and thus there arrived a welcome addition to the library of the most important room in England.

One of the first people the visitor encounters on entering the house is the office-keeper. The door-keeper who admits him does not live in No. 10, but the office-keeper is accommodated on the premises, second-floor-front. He lives in a comfortable flat containing three bedrooms, a bathroom, dressing-room, sitting-room, dining-room and kitchen. The office-keeper, the door-keeper, a coal porter for the official part of the house, and messengers are supplied to No. 10 from the Treasury.

The Office of Works, which looks after the building as a shell, has nothing whatever to do with the provision of staff. It is the responsibility of each tenant, or his wife, to arrange his own staff for No. 10. The office-keeper at present in the house is tall, grey-haired and of a dignified bearing. He has been on the staff of the Treasury for thirty years—the last eighteen in No. 10 Downing Street.

On the second-floor, where the office-keeper has his quarters, the rooms are considerably smaller than

those on the ground and first-floors, consequently they are more numerous. In addition to the flat already mentioned, there are eight bedrooms, a store-room, a box-room, an extra sitting-room mainly used by the staff and a sewing-room.

The pictures in No. 10 are, many of them, by Old Masters, though they have not been universally appreciated, some Premiers finding them rather gloomy. It would indeed be surprising if this house, going furnished from tenant to tenant, should be satisfying to the artistic susceptibilities of each of them, but they are always at liberty to store in the cellars any paintings or furniture that does not appeal to them and substitute their own things for the time being. Most of the pictures are lent by different Galleries. In the main they are decoratively unsuitable, dark and dull.

One has sympathy with Mr. Asquith, a man to whom art in any form made little appeal, who is reputed to have said that he found them most depressing. Apart from any brought as personal possessions and prides by the tenant of the moment, the only picture which is really striking and in place is the portrait of Walpole in the Cabinet Room.

Both Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. MacDonald, men of taste, preferred that a number of the pictures should be relegated to offices or staff-rooms during their tenancies and replaced them with some of their personal art treasures. If the unwanted pictures are large and cumbersome the Office of Works will oblige

by having them removed, and probably sent back, with thanks, to the Gallery which lent them.

On coming again to the entrance-hall the visitor to No. 10 retains a feeling of amazement at the rambling nature of the house and at the number of rooms hidden behind its narrow Downing Street façade. Only the unwarrantably critical will quibble at the mixtures of styles and tastes.

Though in these days Premiers may leave souvenirs behind them in the shape of new books for the library, it is not by any means a collateral privilege that they should take away a memento of their tenancy. Many years ago it used to be a practice for Prime Ministers to take some little treasure away, be it of however little value, to remind them of the historic building. Nowadays this cannot be. The strictly kept inventories prevent any sentimental Prime Minister from removing anything in memory of his tenancy. But it is related that on one occasion, not very many years ago, an outgoing tenant tried to make away with the door-handle of the Cabinet Room. The tale goes that the Office of Works soon traced this missing valuable. Correspondence ensued, reports were drafted, submitted, perused, revised and reported on, and the door-handle was returned to No. 10, once more to be fixed to the door of the room wherein the fates of nations have been decided.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MISTS OF TIME

Earliest Downing Street site—Tyburn and Thorney—Traditions of Government—Arrival of Christianity—Apollo ousted twice—Miracles—Westminster takes shape—Domesday—Sportsmen of early days—First buildings in “Downing Street”—The Axe Brewery—The Peacock Inn.

**T**ELLING the story of No. 10 Downing Street should involve far more than an account of the personalities and labours of the various Prime Ministers who have lived in the house. Associated with the building, and with the street in which it stands, is a mature atmosphere which intrigues the imagination and which cannot satisfactorily be explained by the history of a mere two hundred years. But, in this instance, to delve into the facts of the distant past is a perilous undertaking, for although the Downing Street site has surely a dramatic and astonishing story, experts are divided in their opinions upon many an important detail.

Standing at the forest's edge to fathom the depths of some convenient glade the traveller's eye sees at first a path that is plain and simple, but soon it detects shades and uncertainties leading at last to a speck of gloom. The question as to what lies in these shades, and in the far-distant obscurity, probably will be decided differently by any two pairs of eyes.

Fortunately, however, so far as Downing Street is concerned, the broad outline of the ancient story is reasonably clear, and may be told, it is hoped, without offending the theories of any student of the neighbourhood. Certainly very early times bore their share in shaping the character of the locality, and ultimately of the house itself, and so the story must be incomplete which is not linked in turn with Druid, Roman, Saxon, Norman, all of whom have shared in producing the atmosphere of the historic spot where to-day British statesmen meet in conference.

In ancient days the importance attached to the site now occupied by the official home of the British Prime Minister may well have been dictated by its strategic significance. It formed part of the large, irregularly shaped gravel bank on Thames edge which became known as Thorney Island, and Thorney Island almost certainly was regarded as an important key to London in particular and to the country north of the Thames in general.

Two thousand years ago the Thames was sluggish and its course was far wider than the deep channel to which it is now confined. Widely at Westminster, and extensively over present-day South London, the river alternately flowed its tidal waters into marshes and fens, and, on the ebb, received tribute from streams that wound lazily among islands they themselves had thrown up. The "ey" ending to places familiarly upon the lips of Londoners indicates that these districts were once islands. Bermonds-ey,



Batters-ey, Chesil-ey, the shingle island formed by the old Westbourne River, were all neighbours of Thorney Island, the delta of the Tyburn River.

Standing in the middle of this shingle bank, coarse river plants growing at his feet, an observer would have found himself apparently surrounded by extensive and impassable marshes. But Thorney was the meeting-point of a ford across the Thames and of a practicable if somewhat uneasy passage through the swamplands on the northern bank.

The Tyburn River, to which Thorney Island owed its existence, rose somewhere in the neighbourhood of the modern FitzJohn Avenue, and, after pursuing a winding course, eventually debouched into Bulinga Fen, which once covered much of the area now occupied by St. James's Park, the Green Park and Buckingham Palace. At a spot directly in front of the place where the Palace now stands the stream forked. Hence, it is said, the name "Tyburn"—Teo-burna, or two rivers. It is generally agreed that the southerly branch of Tyburn River met the Thames in Millbank by Vauxhall. Indeed, eventually it was made the ancient boundary of the City of Westminster, and ultimately suffered the ignominious fate of most of London's historic streams, in being converted into a sewer. This very fact, however, simplifies the determination of its course, for, as the King's Scholar's Pond Sewer, it is well marked in early maps.

Authorities differ considerably upon the subject of the course followed by the northerly stream, but

while some experts suppose it to have flowed down Gardeners Lane—well below Downing Street—there is good authority for the view that it travelled by way of the north end of King Street—now absorbed in Parliament Street—and joined the Thames at the north end of Cannon (Channel) Row.

Another school of opinion has it that this branch followed the line of St. James's Park and Scotland Yard, debouching into the main stream where once was old Scotland Dock. Perhaps we are wise in again being guided by sewerage information. The Statutes of 1796 describe a sewer flowing from Downing Street to the north end of Cannon Row. Probably this is the most accurate guess that can now be made at the course of Tyburn's northerly branch. Thus Thorney Island lay in marshy country between the two streams of Tyburn River.

If Thorney still existed as an island it would be seen to carry on its shingly surface New Scotland Yard, Downing Street, the Central Hall, part of Tothill Street, the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, and probably part of Victoria Street. It is perfectly clear that there was little dry land to be found in the neighbourhood of Thorney, and it is likely that the courses of the Tyburn streams were not definitely marked. Thus the island must have been a welcome spot to travellers picking their way through the marshes on their way to the ford and thence to the swamplands to the south of the Thames.

Leaving the old Sarn Gwddelin, or Irish Way,

which in ancient times ran for a long distance along the route northwards, afterwards covered by the Roman Watling Street, British travellers journeying to the south would cross the fens and land on Thorney Island in the neighbourhood of the Downing Street site. Here, probably, they would await the opportunity of low tide on the Thames to make their crossing by the ford. To simplify the passage of the marshes some early engineer contrived a causeway of large stones marked by stakes, and it is likely that the bed of the Thames across to Lamb Hythe, or "place of Mud," was similarly accommodated.

If we are right in supposing that, in the days of the Early British, Thorney Island had already become a place of casual meetings between travellers, it is easy to understand that as time passed it might well become the centre of a small resident community. This suggestion is perhaps supported by the fact that several writers have pointed out indications of artificial constructions in Tothill. Indeed, it is possible that Tothill was originally a Gorsedd Mound. The word "Gorsedd," from the old Gaelic, means "Supreme Seat," and refers to those places of assembly where the Druidic worship was practised and where the dispensation of justice and civil administration took place.

An example of a gorsedd mound for which we have greater authority than Westminster's Tothill, is the Tynewald in the Isle of Man. The Tynewald is still used for the annual session of the Manx Parliament, and in Druidic times it was the scene of the

convocations held, as, perhaps, on Tothill, at the solstices and equinoxes. It would seem, therefore, that even as long ago as Druidic times government may have been administered in the close vicinity of Downing Street ground.

Circumspect as lack of definite record should make the student of these early days, he may feel entitled to be a little more definite with the approach of the Roman era. The presence of a Druidic College suggests the strong probability that in 55 B.C. there was much coming and going of British Chiefs and their advisers. Religious ceremonies followed by council meetings on the sacred hill would seek to discover the surest means of repelling the attack which the Romans obviously intended sooner or later to make upon these shores.

The fear of Julius Cæsar was not confined to the Continent, and there can be no doubt that the Britons anticipated invasion long before it came. The Druids maintained a service of messengers who kept them in touch with Cæsar's movements. Information would not be hard to secure, for Britain had carried on trade with the Continent more or less regularly for more than three hundred years. So the priests of Tothill would make sacrifice—quite possibly human as well as animal victims were employed—and afterwards advise the assembled warriors upon the latest developments and upon the most propitious time and place to stay the enemy advance.

When Cæsar stayed in the country only six weeks,

despite the considerable preparations he had made, it is likely that the Druids took much credit to themselves, and there would be rejoicing and thanksgiving upon Thorney Island. Next year, however, sacrifice and prayer proved less efficacious, and the conqueror advanced steadily with five legions and two thousand cavalry. But it was not until some time shortly after A.D. 43, or approximately a hundred years later, that a military settlement was established on the island, and the clank of Roman arms echoed over the site of No. 10.

Aulus Plautius had arrived with a not inconsiderable army of 50,000 troops. Landing at Dover, Hythe and Richborough, the legions had made their victorious way with only minor skirmishes to impede them. On coming to London, however, they had met with a far more stubborn resistance, and Thorney Island undoubtedly shared in much of the ensuing battle.

The Britons defended the north bank of the Thames at its most vulnerable points, that is, where fords were to be found. From Chelsea along the marshes and islands as far as the spot where Tower Bridge now stands, all available forces were mustered. The centre of the British line probably lay near Thorney, which would have been found a suitable spot from which to observe the progress of the engagement round the elbow of the river. Thus the direction of the defence may even have taken place from "Downing Street" ground.

On the farther bank, where now stands the County Hall, stood the Roman troops, arrayed line upon line, their armour glittering in the sun. At what spot the well-armed, well-organised legions first gained the northern shore is not certain—probably it was at Chelsea. Though many invaders perished in the treacherous swamps, the river was crossed, the battle won, and the Imperial Army pitched camp.

Thorney Island was established eventually as a permanent Roman station, and it was here that the Emperor Claudius was received with great ceremony when he came to review conquered Britain. A bridge had been constructed in the neighbourhood of Westminster, but the richly caparisoned elephants, which formed part of the procession, crossed by the ford.

When Watling Street had been built over the line of the old Sarn Gwyddelin, Thorney became far more active than had ever before been the case. That the encampment was of importance has been established by the remains of the period that from time to time have been discovered. In 1869, for instance, was found the sarcophagus of a certain Valerius Amandinus. This is now in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey, and from the cross on the stone lid it seems probable that Amandinus was a Christian.

About fifteen years later a portion of mosaic paving was discovered under the nave of the Abbey. No doubt this once formed part of the floor of a villa belonging to a member of the invading army. Indeed, all over Thorney from "Downing Street"

to Tothill digging has disclosed fragments of brick, house tiles and other relics. When the ancient buildings of which these remains formed part were all in occupation Thorney must have been a populous spot.

It is unfortunate that the story of these thrilling times has not been more definitely recorded in relation to Thorney, but out of the uncertainties of antiquity there emerges the clear tradition of a Temple of Apollo, built shortly after the Roman occupation of London. That a place of worship should have been set upon the marsh-girt island is natural enough, for the troops stationed here would not long have suffered separation from the gods of their sunny homeland. No remains of this temple have so far been found, but it is likely that they lie far beneath the foundations of Westminster Abbey. Druid mysticism gave way to the more material worship of the practical-minded conqueror, and the soil, later to be trodden by the rulers of an Empire founded upon the ideals of brotherhood, was stamped hard by the feet of men who held their possessions by the sword.

As time passed private villas were added to the barracks of the soldiery, and gradually the local Britons became Romanised. Eventually the island military station would have become a kind of marsh-side suburb of London. The fact that it lay at the junction of the ford and the track through the swamps would have made it a likely spot for small traders to settle.

Travellers moving back and forth would require

rest and refreshment and thus provide business. By Watling Street from the north would come merchants with their goods and pack-animals, and soldiers with, maybe, prisoners from fighting near the Wall. Crossing the marshes, they would land near the site of No. 10, and there await low tide to ford the Thames. There was also the Chelsea crossing for their use, but this would not have been employed to the exclusion of the Thorney Island route.

Wood and metal work were foremost among the British crafts of the time, and highly decorated bowls, cups and tankards were produced. Hides, cattle and corn were also exported in considerable quantities. No doubt consignments of these commodities passed frequently through Thorney on their way to the Dover Road and Rome. British hunting dogs were much prized in Italy, and many of these found their way by the same route to the kennels of Roman nobility. From the south, on the other hand, would come pottery, beads, amber and ivory, the principal imports of those days.

Thus life on Thorney continued for perhaps as long as three hundred years, while missionary Christianity made steady progress throughout the country. The first King of Britain to be converted to the new faith had many close associations with the island. This was Lucius, whom the old Welsh chroniclers call *Lleurwg ap Coel ap Cyllin*, his native name. With the ardent fanaticism of the new convert Lucius demolished Thorney's Temple of Apollo, and, in about the year

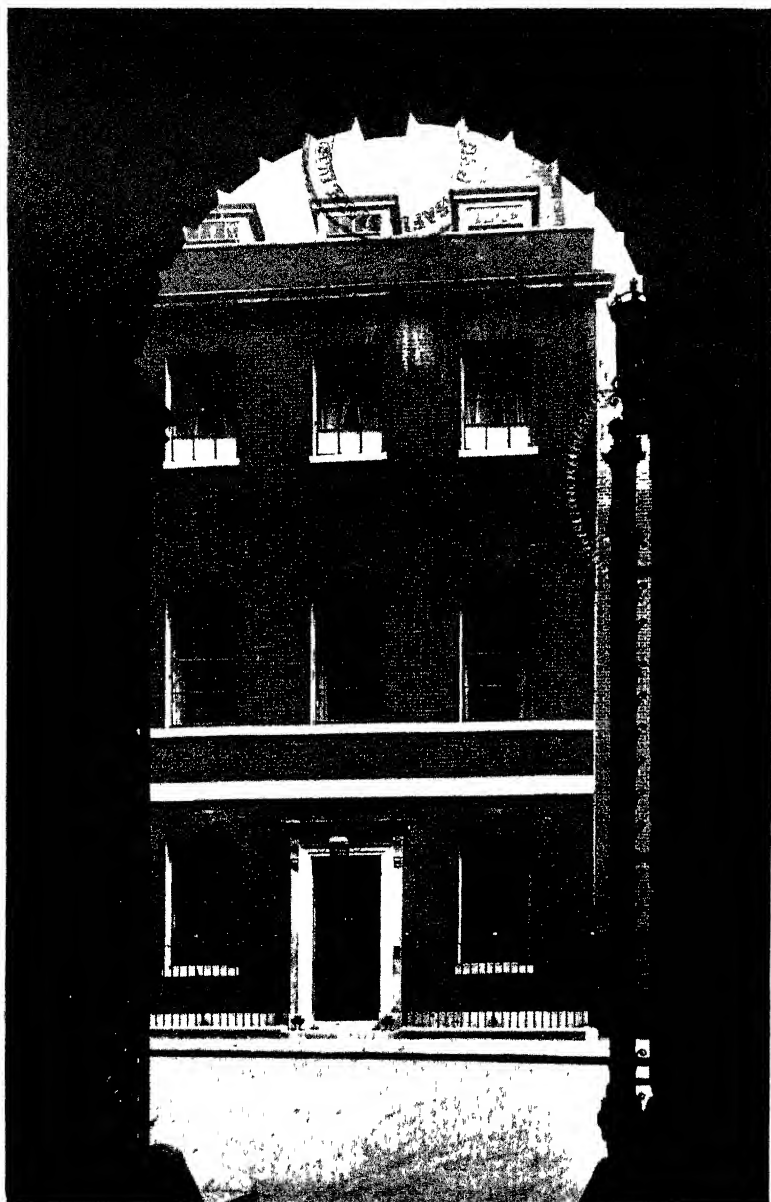


A.D. 183, set up a Christian church in its place. This building was dedicated to St. Peter.

Thus the soil of Downing Street has been trodden by the priests of three distinct faiths ; first the Druids whose College had stood upon the site of the Temple of Apollo, and close beside the spot which is now Tothill ; next the Romans ministering to the doctrines of strength and beauty ; and finally by Christians overthrowing superstitions with reasoned and clearer thought. Incidentally, it is interesting to mention that the ancient Druidic College had instituted the rights of sanctuary and that there was sanctuary in Westminster nearly a thousand years after Druidic worship had passed away.

From time to time glimpses are secured of life on Thorney during the Roman occupation. For instance, in 1910 gold coins of the period of Carausius were found in a barge buried deep in Thames mud. An interesting theory is advanced to account for the sinking of this vessel. Carausius is known to have been active in defending Britain from the marauding pirates who frequently raided her shores. These pirates were bold fellows and would often sail up the rivers in search of loot. It is quite possible that the galley may have been sunk in an encounter off Thorney between some of these ruffians and Roman defenders.

Perhaps the raiders were attracted by news of rich merchandise carried south by way of the Thames fords. That a fight took place seems likely, but no



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"No. 10" FROM FOREIGN OFFICE QUADRANGLE



one will ever know whether the raiders found booty on the island. It would have been by no means impossible for pirates to penetrate so far inland if they chose their opportunity and perhaps took advantage of a covering fog.

How far adrift the fogs of those days caused captains to be in their reckonings is shown by an incident that occurred in the year 296. Half a division of Roman soldiery, bound for defence stations along the Kentish coast, were lost at sea in a thick fog. When the mist lifted the captain found that they had mistakenly rounded the North Foreland, and, fearing that the weather had not cleared for long, they decided to sail up the Thames to London. Their misfortune proved most opportune for the people of London, for, incited by the crew of a strange vessel that had arrived in the port, a regiment of mercenaries had mutinied and at the time of the arrival of the Roman troops were engaged in slaying the inhabitants. The soldiers quickly disembarked and succeeded in restoring order.

At about this time, probably in the year 313, Lucius' church on Thorney Island was again turned into a Temple of Apollo, and thus the "Downing Street" neighbourhood once more changed its religion. It is not certain whether the church was demolished and a new temple built or whether in the main it was left as it had stood for the past two hundred years. Once more priests of the Sun God worshipped on ground which was later again to

become the stronghold of Christianity ; once more they argued the tenets of their faith at the spot where, many centuries later, statesmen speaking with equal faith were to argue their political creeds. But this proved the swan-song of the ancient gods, and soon, in blood and desolation, great changes were to come upon Thorney and the site of No. 10.

Under Constantius Rome began to withdraw her troops from Britain in the year 407. By 440 the last of the garrisons had returned to their native land, and the pampered Britons were left unprotected. Perhaps the little Thames-side island had been the scene of many unhappy partings. Roman soldiers had taken British wives, and in many ways the two races had become fast knit. Naturally, however, with the coming of the great retreat it would not always be possible that families should accompany the troops to Rome. Then the villas of Thorney were emptied of their last Roman inhabitants.

Gradually a new change came over this spot which had started its existence as a shingle bank thrown up by Tyburn and the tides of Thames. Brambles covered the villas and their pagan temple, and orderliness and law relaxed their hold upon what few habitations still remained. Evil rumours, attended eventually by stark fear, thinned the numbers of the merchants and travellers who had commonly tarried in this halting-place by the ford. Eventually only a few fishermen remained on the island and in the surrounding marsh.

Then one day the peace of the wilderness was rudely broken. For long past the fishermen, gathering for company in their huts at night, had whispered of marauding vessels sighted off the coast of Kent. Now their anxious voices were replaced by fierce foreign shouts. From Thanet, Saxon hordes swept suddenly over Kent and on towards London. To the north other invaders were already pillaging the hamlets of Essex. Those whom they found they killed or carried captive. Inland retreated the conquered Britons. The madness passed, and again peace came to the island in the Thames. But it was the peace of decay.

Thicker grew the brambles, and soon most traces of the busy life that had passed and repassed disappeared. The ford remained to serve such few chance travellers as came that way, and perhaps some, more curious than their fellows, wondered at the past uses of old bricks that were occasionally unearthed. Over the muddy corner destined to become the hub of an Empire the marsh mists lay calm and undisturbed.

Deserted, grim, the island that was yet to guide the destinies of millions slept desolate. Thus for a century and a half Thorney Island remained unconsidered. Meanwhile the Saxons had turned from the sword to cultivate the fertile country they had won. Eventually King Sebert, a Christian, having built St. Paul's Church on the site of a Roman temple to Diana, decided that it would be only decent that the old church of Lucius,

latterly, as before its foundation, a Temple of Apollo, and then but ruins, should be rebuilt and consecrated.

An interesting story concerning the rebuilding of Thorney Church has come down to us from the lips of a certain Edric, a local fisherman. It tells of no less an event than a visit said to have been paid by St. Peter to the lonely island. After Sebert had discussed the new church with Mellitus, his Bishop of London, the work of building was begun with enthusiasm. This must have been soon after A.D. 600.

When the church was finished it was arranged that the Bishop should visit Thorney to perform the ceremony of dedication. But when Mellitus and Sebert arrived on the island for this occasion they were met by Edric, who had a strange and wonderful tale to tell. Apparently on the previous midnight Edric awoke to the sound of his name being called. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he rose from his rough bed of rushes to learn who it was that summoned him at so late an hour. He saw that a stranger wished to be ferried to Thorney from the far bank of the river. Grumbling at the demand of this visitor who had so inopportunately disturbed his rest, he pushed off from the bank after fumbling for his oars in their hiding-place amongst the reeds.

The return journey was a silent one, for the stranger did not speak. Soon Edric's annoyance was replaced by curiosity concerning the identity of this visitor who had called him by name and yet was not one whom he remembered to have met. Further, the

stranger's garments were of a kind that Edric had never before seen. "No doubt a man bringing the sacred vessels for to-morrow's ceremony," thought the fisherman, noting that his companion appeared to be carrying something of this kind. "But why at this time of night?"

When he had landed, the visitor left Edric resting on his oars. Straight to the new church he went, and no sooner had he gone within than from the building, suddenly and unaccountably ablaze with light, came the voices of a choir. The deep voice of the stranger spoke the ceremony of dedication, and the choir took up the responses.

Edric sank on his knees, and as he gazed, listening raptly to the voices ringing through the still night, the service ended and the stranger again stood beside him. Edric fell on his face, but the stranger raised him, saying that he need not be afraid. Edric knew now that his companion was Saint Peter.

As they rowed back across the river the Saint told Edric to tell the Bishop of his coming, adding that visible evidence of the ceremony that had been performed would be found in the church. Moreover, Edric was to cast his nets into the river and they would be miraculously filled. Once on land, the stranger disappeared. Edric put about and did as he had been bidden. He cast and drew up his nets, and soon the boat was so laden with fish that as he returned to Thorney he was in danger of sinking.

This was the tale told to the King and Mellitus.



Marvelling at the conviction with which the fisherman spoke, they entered the church and immediately found plentiful signs of the ceremony that had taken place. There was wax from candles and the scent of rare incense. No further hallowing was needed, but a service of thanksgiving was held immediately, and this was followed by a feast in which Edric's fishes took pride of place. The miracle of the hallowing has often been told, and, of course, it has been much criticised. But whether regarded as fable, allegory, or simple fact it is a charming story. One wonders if Edric, that man of visions, ever dimly foresaw the glories that time would bring to his simple home.

Mellitus afterwards persuaded Sebert to establish a band of Augustinian monks on Thorney Island. This happened in 605, and it was at this time that the name "Westminster" first came into use. There was already a monastery in the City of London. It stood roughly where Great Tower Hill is now located. This monastery was called East Minster. What was more natural, therefore, than that the new religious establishment should be known as West Minster?

Now Thorney's long connection with pagan religious worship was overshadowed in the minds of the people by legends concerning Lucius' church, that early house of Christianity built of timber and roofed with rushes, and the island came to be regarded as a sacred place. "*Locus terribilis*" it is later described, meaning not, as some writers have had it,

a fearful place, but rather a hallowed spot. Oldest of the documents referring to the Abbey is a conveyance of Offa, King of Mercia, bearing the date 785. Here the description "*locus terribilis*" is used. And so peace and the pursuits of peace returned to and continued in Thorney—for a time. But there came a day when again bad news reached the marsh-girt island.

The Danes, it was said, had been seen off the coast, and had even raided a number of towns. Hard on the heels of the messengers came the invaders themselves. Again the country was ravaged.

The story does not need to be retold except as it affects Downing Street ground. Marauding Danes made a practice of seeking religious houses, for they often provided rich booty of gold and silver ornaments. Exactly what happened at Thorney is not known, but there seems to have been a fierce battle at the crossing of the Thames, and the Danes landed on the island. The story is an ugly one, for the conquerors proceeded to sack Westminster and to slay its monks. Farnham seems to have been the objective of the raiders, but according to the *Chronicles of Ethelweard*, they fortified the island and were there besieged in the year 893 by Earl Ethelred.

Unlike the Romans and the Saxons before them, the Danes plundered and passed on. They were essentially men of war. With the ending of their raids the isle of Thorney enjoyed a period of peace until invasion again disturbed its progress.

It is interesting to picture life in the district, in these years prior to the Norman Conquest. The monastery destroyed by the Danes had been rebuilt in the reign of Edgar, and the slain monks replaced by members of the Benedictine Order sent from Glastonbury. Their first Abbot, Bishop Wolsine, was a good man and a generous one, and his influence left its mark. Indeed, it was in his day that the story of Westminster Monastery really begins.

Monks in those days, and indeed for several hundreds of years thereafter, fulfilled the functions of learning and literature. They taught the novices who were to fill their places and exchanged learning with visitors from foreign lands. The public schools of to-day may be said to have their origin in the work of the monasteries.

In those ancient days the Scriptorium of Westminster was famed for the work its students accomplished in copying manuscripts and in illuminating books. These then were the new interests and ideals about which centred life on Thorney Island. Apart from their religious and literary labours the monks worked in the fields adjoining their home, and tended the cattle feeding in pasture-lands now occupied by Holborn and Oxford Street. The lowing of cows and the bleating of sheep drifted in at the doors of byres and herdsmen's shacks.

The monks traded in metals, skins and wool with the merchants who came by sea and river to Thorney from the Rhine, the Rhône, the Seine and the

Garonne. And many a pretty bargain their thrifty training must have secured for them. Simple men that they were, they understood the humanity of the people amongst whom they lived, for much learning and a confusion of creeds had not yet blunted the powerful influence of the humbler members of the Church. In the cool of the evening they were to be found mixing with the villagers, discussing the happenings of the day, and joining them in drinking and song.

It was during this short-lived period of tranquillity that King Edward the Confessor rebuilt old Thorney Church. This event took place under unusual circumstances. One day Edward was visited by Wolfinius, a holy man who lived a hermit's life and who was revered by all who knew his reputation for saintliness.

The hermit was not accustomed to use many words in expressing his wishes, and now he told the King shortly that he had seen St. Peter in a vision and that the Saint had said that Edward must rebuild the church. No news could have pleased the Confessor better, but he was in a difficult predicament, for during his exile in Normandy he had vowed that should he come to the throne in England he would make a pilgrimage to St. Peter's tomb in Rome. He now wished to keep this vow, but his councillors had endeavoured to dissuade him, saying that peace could not be maintained in his absence.

Wolfinius' message seemed to offer a way out of

the difficulty. The position was explained to Pope John, who absolved Edward in a Brief requesting that the money which would otherwise have been spent on the journey should be given to the poor and that the church should be rebuilt. All this occurred in the year 1045, and for a happy period thereafter the future home of Imperial policy heard the busy tapping of fast-plied hammers and the musical tinkle of masons' trowels.

The respite was not for long, for soon there was again marching and counter-marching gravely affecting the future of a harassed Thorney. But for the time being it is indeed a pretty picture that we may paint of these Saxon days. Edward is not strong, but gentle and devout. Often the Royal *cortège* comes, picking a dainty course through difficult fenlands, or splashing bravely in the ford, the sun doing his best with majesty that gives more careful thought to the sayings of the saints than to the gay trappings of a court.

There are plans to be inspected, architects to be cross-questioned upon the details of the work, and humble labourers to be congratulated upon the enthusiasm of their toil. The keen interest of Royalty presses the work towards completion, but funds are exhausted more rapidly than had been anticipated, and anxious argument and the frugal use of depleted supplies fail to achieve their desired end. The church cannot be finished. There is no more to be said.

But there is more to be done, apparently, for ford

water splashes urgently beneath the hooves of Royalty's charger. The Crown estates shall not be spared. Better that Royalty should go cloakless than that St. Peter should lack his promised House of God. The craftsmen cheer and return to their chisels and mallets, while architects shake their heads over the estimates for new commands.

Presently Benedictine monks arrive from Exeter to mount jealous guard over the Crown and Regalia given into their care. Once more the tolling of bells drifts Londonwards. Thus are fulfilled the commands of St. Peter given through the mouth of Wolfinius, the holy man. Of the Confessor's building some few stones remain in the fabric of the present Abbey, most of them in pillars below the level of the street. There are some columns in the Infirmary Chapel, and the Chapel of the Pyx contains material that was originally part of Edward's work.

But the good days were almost passed. Soon the herdsmen and the market-gardeners of Thorney interrupted their labours at unaccustomed times, clustering in sunny spots, to whisper excitedly of the rumours that arrived ever more insistently from London. Gossip from the taverns and the Court gave place to talk of impending invasion. It was said that William of Normandy claimed the English Crown by right of an oath passed by King Harold when a prisoner in foreign parts.

Perhaps these groups of anxious yokels discussed the foreign policy of their day upon the very ground

where No. 10 now stands. Probably a monk, as a person of education and spiritual authority, would be spokesman at most of these rustic parliaments. Could such an oath be considered as binding on the King? What were the chances of resistance should invasion really begin?

Then came more definite news from the North. Harold Hardrada and the traitor Tostig had landed and been defeated in a great battle at Stamford Bridge. How went the story: "Six feet of English earth or a trifle more, considering he was a man of uncommon stature"? Ha! 'Twas like Harold, that. And a fair reply to the invader. Harold was a man of pretty wit. The menace of Hardrada had been handled. What next? And we may imagine the monks and their simple flock waiting eagerly for news. Forced marches to the south! A weary army hastening to fresh battles.

Harold was unwise to be precipitate. So the Norman had encamped near Hastings! Doubtless King Harold would offer battle on the high ground near Senlac. So said the monks. Well, a drubbing could be administered as well, no doubt, on Sussex earth as upon the soil of Yorkshire. The Normans, dangerous foes? Aye, but could they stand against a Saxon Harold fresh from victories in the north? A short interval without news, and then couriers and the first soldiers of shattered regiments. An arrow through the right eye? *Requiescat in pace!* So came new rule again to Thorney.

The Norman Conquest was the first major invasion of Britain in which Westminster had not borne its share of the bloodshed and destruction. The Conqueror marched on London after his victory. Southwark was set afire as an example to the citizens. The surrender of the city was then demanded. Harold was dead, and so London agreed to accept William, and on Christmas Day, 1066, he was crowned in Westminster Abbey. This momentous event was the occasion of a strange disturbance. Stationed outside the Abbey, probably on ground lying between the church door and the site of Downing Street, was a body of William's troops. Doubtless the Norman was still uncertain of the temper of his new subjects and was determined to take no unnecessary risks.

The ceremony was well advanced when some sudden and unexpected shouting caused the troops to suppose that their leader was being set upon before the altar. With cries of rage they rushed across the intervening ground and burst through the great doorway. Inside, all was quiet, and the Conqueror was preparing to receive the Crown. But the irruption of the troops terrified the assembled people, who imagined that treachery was planned against them, and that they were to be slaughtered where they stood. So over the soil of the future No. 10 fled a frightened rabble of citizens, leaving their foreign King to be proclaimed without the plaudits of Saxon subjects.

Then came a day in which the atmosphere of sanctity,



long associated with Thorney Island, was enormously enhanced. It happened that Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester and the last Saxon Bishop after the Conquest, was threatened with ejection from his See. William wished to declare him incapable of holding office, on the ground that he was unable to speak the Norman language.

The Churchman was summoned to Westminster to a council at which he was to be formally deposed. But instead of taking the situation calmly, as no doubt had been expected, he challenged his enemies boldly. He walked out of the council with the King and with the Norman Archbishop following him. He walked straight to the tomb of Edward the Confessor, invoked his spirit in a speech in Saxon and laid his pastoral staff on the tomb. Then in broken French he defied the Normans to remove it. They tried but could not do so, for it was bound to the stone by a force that was more than human. Wulfstan retained his bishopric, and the story of the miracle he had worked on Thorney Island brought the place into great veneration.

By this time some rudimentary system of drainage had emptied part of the marshes of Whitehall, or Merflete. Some idea of the then condition of the neighbourhood is given by the records in Domesday Book. It is described as a "Manor within the hundred of Ossulston in Middlesex, belonging to the Church of St. Peter." This estate contained only twenty-five houses, but was mainly walled about,

having a gate approximately where now Downing Street meets Whitehall. Domesday is most explicit :

“ In the village where the Church of St. Peter is situated, the abbot of the same place holds thirteen hides and a half. There is land to eleven ploughs. Nine hides and one virgate belong to the demesne, and there are four ploughs therein. The villanes have six ploughs, and one plough more may be made. There are nine villanes of one virgate each, one villane of one hide ; and nine villanes of half a virgate each ; and one cottager of five acres ; and forty-one cottagers to pay forty shillings a year for their gardens. Meadow for eleven ploughs. Pasture for the cattle of the village. Pannage for one hundred hogs. And twenty-five houses of the knights of the Abbott and of their vassals, to pay eight shillings a year. Its whole value is Ten Pounds ; the same when received ; in King Edward’s time Twelve Pounds. This manor was and is the demesne of the church of St. Peter of Westminster.

“ In the same village Bainiard holds three hides of the Abbott. There is land for two ploughs, and these are there in the demesne, and one cottager. Pannage for one hundred hogs. Pasture for the cattle. There are four arpents and vineyard, newly planted. Its whole value sixty shillings ; when received twenty shillings ; in King Edward’s time Six Pounds. This land belonged and belongs to the Church of St. Peter.”

This description indicates the agricultural surroundings of the Downing Street neighbourhood in

the eleventh century. Where No. 10 now stands, cattle and sheep browsed among groves of oak trees under which hogs rootled for acorns. Where Ministers to-day address Cabinet meetings in quiet and measured tones, then was heard the baaing of lambs and the mooing of cows. Probably the only real houses on the estate, as houses are judged to-day, were those belonging to the dependants of the Monastery and the knights who served the Abbot. Certainly the homes of the cottagers were no more than rude lean-to shacks, clustered together for protection, built of rough-hewn timber, and roofed with thatching.

Years passed, kings ruled and died, Magna Carta was signed on another island in the Thames, the Crusades impoverished England. But Thorney saw few changes until the year 1220, when the church was once again rebuilt. Henry II replaced Edward the Confessor's building with another erected largely at the expense of the citizens of the City of London. The King himself had insufficient money. He is reputed to have secured the funds from the City merchants by some piece of double-dealing, the exact nature of which is not recorded. The monks did a considerable amount of work themselves in enlarging their premises towards the west, and all was complete "after fifty years' time and a wonderful charge."

There was much dissension between the monks of Westminster and the Bishopric of London. Both parties claimed the dues from the Monastery Lands. In support of their claims the monks produced a



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THE PRIME MINISTER'S STUDY



charter, dated 951, purporting to define the boundaries of St. Margaret's parish. This would date from the time when the Monastery was rebuilt, in Edgar's reign, but there is considerable doubt as to the authenticity of this document. It is probable that it came into existence at a much later date and was, in fact, actually forged by the monks themselves. With the increasing prosperity of the Monastery the See of London cast covetous eyes upon its rich perquisites and, in those uncertain times, it is likely that the monks thought it advisable to interpret the goodwill that Edgar had undoubtedly borne to them in some visible and solid form. This document is still in existence.

In 1222, however, the Monastery of Westminster and the Parish of St. Margaret were definitely exempted by decree from the See of London. Westminster had no local government and consequently little commerce. In the City of London every trade and craft flourished ; but the wool staple, established in 1352, was the only commercial market in Westminster, and even this was of no great importance. Further, the development of the port of Walbrook took from Thorney much of the trade which at one time it probably enjoyed.

At about this time occurred an incident which, by throwing a vivid light upon the life of the people who inhabited Thorney and its neighbourhood, helps greatly in recreating the atmosphere of the "Downing Street" of the period. Stretching approximately

from the Downing Street site, over part of Whitehall as we know it and down to the river bank, once stood the palace of Hubert de Burgh. De Burgh was Earl of Kent and Justiciar of England and had bought his property from the monks for 140 silver marks, a price which included the inheritance of certain houses and a chapel. By way of "ground rent" he paid the monks yearly on the first day of St. Edward one wax taper weighing three pounds.

One day it was decided to hold in St. James's Fields a wrestling match between the champions of Westminster and those of the City of London. De Burgh was probably present at this contest and there is no doubt that he enjoyed the spectacle, for, the Westminster team being worsted, the good people of Thorney decided that defeat could not be accepted without forcible protest, and so came to the rescue of their champions with spears and cudgels.

Great was the laying-on and the taking of blows, and while it appears that none of the ardent sportsmen lost their lives, the offence to the dignity of the City burgesses was adjudged so considerable that drastic steps were decided upon to persuade Westminster neighbours of the practical value of the sporting spirit. So on the first available opportunity the offended wrestlers of London and other lads of mettle gathered within the City limits. Thence they proceeded privily into Westminster territory and with abrupt decision began to pull down the Abbott's house.

To this point De Burgh seems to have enjoyed the humour of the situation, but in his opinion determined attack upon Church property carried the fun a thought too far. He acted with determination and despatch, even if his decision does lack justice to the modern mind. Demanding of the City Elders the persons of the ringleaders of the outrage, he sought from them an explanation of the incident. The explanation that the "sportsmen" of Westminster had offered extreme provocation was deemed insufficient excuse, and the unfortunate prisoners were executed forthwith.

On the death of Hubert de Burgh, 1242, his palace passed, under the terms of his will, to the Friars Predicant. These were the Black Friars of Holborn. Having no great use for the Palace itself, the Friars sold it to the Archbishop of York, Walter Gray, and, after his death in 1255, it remained the palace of successive Archbishops of York until the time of Cardinal Wolsey.

The Downing Street site and the surrounding neighbourhood at these times was the scene of many a colourful event. There are constant references to jousts being held there, and many noble lords must have spurred their chargers fiercely against each other where nowadays far more serious issues are decided by mere battles of words. Throngs of merchants and gaily clad troupes of entertainers attended the markets and fairs.

Westminster was granted by Henry III, in 1256, a



weekly market which took place on Mondays, and an annual fair to take place on Tothill for three days at the feast of St. Mary Magdalene on June 22nd, the fair lasting from the 21st to the 23rd. Later there were granted two fairs of sixteen days each, the Tothill—or Touthill—fair of St. Mary Magdalene being confirmed and extended in 1298, by a charter of Edward I, to one lasting over a month, starting on the feast of the Translation of Edward the Confessor. This King also granted to the Leper Hospital, which once stood in St. James's Fields on the site that is now occupied by St. James's Palace, the right to hold a fair for five days from St. James's Eve, July 24th. This took place where is now St. James's Park, and from the higher ground upon which Downing Street was later to be built, a remarkably fine view of the motley crowds, the tents, stalls, booths and side-shows must have been obtained. Across the same ground, however, must often have sounded the sad cry of the wretched outcasts in whose favour the fair was held—"Unclean ! Unclean !" To-day it is difficult to associate Whitehall, the stately Horse Guards and the Commonwealth's most famous street with these sights and sounds, but of such are their memories.

Happier to consider are the May Day celebrations held in St. James's Fields and beyond the gate by present-day Downing Street. Children gathered flowers in the hedges and danced and sang songs for charity. An entry in the parish register of 1518 reads : "Item : given by the children of the May game—8d."

In those times fair days held to some extent the position that flag days occupy in modern life, but whereas we are expected to buy a paper flag, the people of ancient Westminster were asked to attend commercial charitable undertakings. The nearest contemporary analogy to the fairs of old exists in our church bazaars and charity fêtes. Probably the fairs brought in comparatively more money than flag days, and it would be an interesting experiment to allow Westminster Hospital to revive St. James's Fair in the modern St. James's Park. The medieval concomitants of roystering drunkards and broken heads need not be repeated.

Had you chanced in the days of the old-time fairs to take a Springtime stroll near the site of No. 10 Downing Street, possibly you would have witnessed the unusual sight of women chasing men and binding them in the streets. This procedure was one of the interesting features of the famous Hock-tide festival, a movable event depending upon the date of Easter. The origin of Hock-tide is obscure, some contending that originally it celebrated a victory over the Danes. In support of this belief is the fact that at Coventry there was regularly held a pageant during which some kind of play or masque was performed showing Englishwomen leading Danes captive.

There is little evidence to link Hock-tide with a victory of this kind, however, and probably a more reliable theory is that the festival derived from an ancient Druidic feast. The chasing and binding

episodes of Hock-tide were the customary methods of making collection for the parish funds, the victim having to pay a ransom for release. For the good of the cause the men were given their chance on a different day of catching any women they could find out of doors. It is interesting to note that the women usually collected twice or three times as much money as the men. Whether this efficiency on the part of the women was due to their natural ability to get what they wanted, or whether the men were less honest in yielding up their collections is a doubtful point. However, the ceremony seems to account for the expression "in hock," referring to pawnbrokers' pledges awaiting redemption.

In the year 1529, when Henry VIII stripped Cardinal Wolsey of all his possessions, the "Downing Street" of the time can have consisted of little more than a few somewhat rickety timber buildings, but amongst them was one known as the Axe Brewery, which stood directly upon the site of No. 10. The street was hemmed in by St. James's Fields, then a verdant deer park; the Tennis Court where Henry VIII showed his mettle, the Bowling Green and the Cock Pit, all built by the King. Such as it was, the street, then as now, was a cul-de-sac, giving on to King Street at its east end close by the gates of Whitehall Palace, until recently known as York Place, and originally the ancient home of Hubert de Burgh.

King Street was the direct route between the Palace and Parliament. It was awkward, narrow and

ill-suited to the considerable volume of traffic that it must have been called upon to carry, for it was one of the most important streets in the country. For at least part of its length it accommodated crowded taverns and lodging-houses, many of which housed in mean rooms important country Members of Parliament when the House was sitting.

An Act of 1532 describes the thoroughfare—as far as the “Downing Street” gate by Whitehall—as “very foul and full of pits and sloughs, very perilous and noyous as well for all the King’s subjects.” But out of this welter of poor housing and doubtful sanitation emerges the Axe Brewery, a building of prime importance, for it affords the first link in bricks and mortar with the No. 10 we know to-day. Beneath the foundations of the home of the Prime Minister may even to-day lie remains of the old Axe Brewery. The property belonged to the Abbott and Covent of Abingdon, and was leased to one Elizabeth Palle. It is likely that, being so close to Whitehall Palace, the brewery supplied Henry VIII’s liquid needs when he had ousted the once-favoured Cardinal from his house. This supposition is supported by the fact that the Axe changed its name to “The King’s Head.”

Many different kinds of beer were brewed in those days, and doubtless the brewery produced a wide variety of drink, from the strong, full-bodied beer destined to quench the Royal thirst to the rather washy type of ale for the consumption of the lower orders about the Court. It must be remembered that

nobody then drank water if liquor were to be had. It was beer for breakfast, beer for dinner and beer for supper, with copious drafts of beer between-times whenever one happened to feel thirsty.

One may suppose that the Axe Brewery enjoyed good trade and that the "Downing Street" building ultimately proved too small to accommodate its activities, for during the later years of Henry's reign the premises ceased to be a brewery. An inn called "The Peacock" which adjoined the old brewery, and which belonged to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster, continued in business for many years afterwards, for Sir Thomas Knyvett, who presently makes his appearance in these pages as occupying a house on the site of the old Axe Brewery, took a lease of this Peacock Inn on April 30th, 1605.

The associations of the Axe Brewery remained for centuries after it had ceased to be. As recently as the year 1824 Downing Street had two taverns; one stood at the King Street end and was called "The Axe and Gate," the other was by the Treasury Passage, had once been named "King Henry VIII's Head," and was then known as "The King's Head." For a while one John Carter occupied the brewery premises at a yearly rental of £7.

Later they were occupied by a certain Everard Everard, jeweller to Royalty. This man was granted his lease by King Henry, and he lived and worked upon the scene of the future labours of Empire statesmen for the term of his natural life. It may seem

unusual that the building was granted at one and the same time as a dwelling-house, store-room and workshop ; but such was the normal procedure of the times. In the absence of rapid transportation, everybody lived above or even in the same room with his work ; the smith with his forge, the tanner with his hides, the merchant with his wares, and Everard Everard, “ Goldsmythe et Jueler,” with the precious gems and metals of his craft.

## CHAPTER III

### DOWNING STREET APPEARS

Knyvett House—"Downing-street" and the Gunpowder Plot—Zoo neighbours—First "Downing-street" survey—Pepys on George Downing—Buckingham's house—Downing turns coat and acquires leases—Building and amalgamation—No. 10 appears and Walpole moves in.

**I**N the days of Everard Everard, and for some considerable period thereafter, the lane where Downing Street now stands can have been little more pretentious than a dirty, uneven alley, just wide enough for the passage of coaches. Pavements were still unknown. An impression of the "Downing Street" of the latter part of the sixteenth century may be had from accounts of conditions common enough in main London thoroughfares.

When, for instance, Queen Elizabeth rode to open Parliament in 1597 the number of onlookers could not have equalled the crowds that now line the way to watch the King ride in state to a like function. But the records tell of scenes of tragedy and confusion caused by the narrowness of the streets. Close by the entrance to the alley which has now become Downing Street many people were smothered and trampled to death in the press of the multitude. Crowds seethed outside the gate of Whitehall. Probably they "threw

up their sweaty night-caps and uttered a deal of stinking breath," but, unlike Shakespeare's Cæsar, Queen Elizabeth does not seem to have fainted.

This tragic incident occurred sixteen years after Thomas Knyvett had succeeded one John Baptist Castilian, a gentleman of the Privy Chamber, in a house on the property which had formerly been occupied by the Axe Brewery. The old brewery of Henry VIII's day had undergone considerable alteration, and no doubt Knyvett's home was comfortable, for the period, but on wet days the mud and squalor on which his front windows looked down cannot have afforded a particularly inspiring prospect.

Knyvett, who also was a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber and Keeper of the Palace, had been granted a life-lease of his property, which he did all he could to improve, for he was a person of considerable consequence and had to maintain an establishment in some style. He represented Thetford in Parliament. He was also a Justice of the Peace in Westminster, and many beggars and petitioners must have walked up the narrow alley to the spot where now stands the mysterious door of No. 10 to entreat alms or influence. Parish accounts of the times show amusing entries. One of particular note occurs in 1597 when Thomas Whitteridge, a beadle, was rewarded with a shilling "in recompense for his pains in going to Paddington with a poor sick man and conveying him out of the parish." Whitteridge's thoughtful deed had naturally saved Westminster the price of feeding the sick man,



having him looked after and also, probably, the cost of his burial. When they could escape the vigilance of the watch, poor destitutes like this beggar would sleep in odd corners outside the house of that kindly-hearted and most polished gentleman, Thomas Knyvett.

Life ran smoothly for Knyvett, even though the surroundings of his home were somewhat sordid. Consistently high in Royal favour, his career was rather as a courtier than as a politician. Even after the death of Elizabeth he continued as a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber at the Court of King James I, who knighted him at the Tower on March 14th, 1604.

Sir Thomas Knyvett's disposition was kindly. Further, he was peacefully minded. So we may assume his supreme disgust at finding himself and his house involved in outwitting the amazing Gunpowder Plot. When Lord Monteagle received his ambiguous letter of warning and reported the facts to Lord Salisbury, it is reasonable to suppose that Knyvett was consulted.

Sir Thomas was a Justice of the Peace and so might be expected to have some knowledge of suspicious persons and happenings in Westminster. He was to take a leading part in the apprehension of the plotters and it is probable that both at Whitehall, and at his residence in the future Downing Street, anxious meetings took place to discuss ways and means of defeating the plot. Some no doubt were in favour of making immediate raids and searches. But it was not known for certain how complete the plans of the

plotters were, so it was eventually decided to wait till the last minute so that as much evidence as possible might be found.

On November 4th Suffolk, the Lord Chamberlain, and Lord Monteagle searched the cellars of the House of Lords. Stacks of wood and heaps of coal which they observed struck them as being the probable hiding-place of the gunpowder. Fawkes they saw in the cellar—"a very bad, desperate fellow" they called him—but avoided saying anything to him which might arouse his suspicions. Fawkes smelt a rat, however, and made haste to warn Percy.

Lord Salisbury decided, after consultation with the King, that the moment to strike had arrived. In company with Lord Monteagle he hastened to "Downing Street" and acquainted Knyvett with what had been discovered. It must indeed have been a dramatic moment as Knyvett buckled on his sword with all speed and made ready to perform a duty which might well end in his death. Perhaps Knyvett was the calmest of the three men. Quickly and efficiently he made his preparations for the sensational arrest that was to follow. Meanwhile, Salisbury and Monteagle strode up and down the room in a sweat of anxiety and impatience, arranging the final details.

It was known that the plotters were desperate men, and there was good reason to fear that unless discovery of the hidden magazine was made without exciting their suspicions any plotters who might be there at the time would fire the gunpowder on the spot rather

than face arrest. To avoid arousing suspicion prematurely, it was arranged that the search of the cellars under the Houses of Parliament should be made on the pretence of looking for some hangings and materials belonging to the King's wardrobe which had been missing since the death of the Queen. This would be a natural thing for Knyvett to do by virtue of his office as Gentleman of the Privy Chamber.

A little before the stroke of twelve on a cold November night Knyvett and his attendants stepped hurriedly out of "Downing Street." As they made their way cautiously to the door of a house where it was known that the mining operations had been carried out, they must have looked more like conspirators themselves than officers of the law. They arrived at a vital moment, narrowly forestalling Fawkes' return from warning his fellow-plotter Percy. On the threshold they met face to face and before Fawkes could draw sword or pistol he was overpowered. Knyvett's search of the cellars revealed the gunpowder, while Fawkes' pockets disclosed the slow-matches and tinder.

Shortly after midnight a dramatic little procession made its way along King Street. It is difficult to say who was bravest in the party, those who had risked their lives in this perilous expedition or the man who had shown such undaunted courage through months of preparation and would not desert his post even when he had cause to fear instant apprehension.

Knyvett conducted Fawkes to the Palace, where, in

the King's bedchamber, a council met at which Fawkes was undoubtedly the calmest person present. He expressed regret only in that the plot had failed. He admitted his own part in the conspiracy, but would not give any other information. "One of his objects," he said, "was to blow the Scots back into Scotland," and when he was asked whether he had no shame that he had taken part in such a dastardly attempt on his Sovereign's life, he merely replied that a desperate disease required a desperate remedy.

From the King Street frontage of his house Sir Thomas may have witnessed a grim scene on January 31st, 1606, when the last act of the drama in which he had played a vital part took place.

On that day Winter, Rockwood, Keyes and Fawkes were drawn from the Tower to the place of execution at the old Palace of Westminster opposite Parliament. Though his pity may have gone out to the tortured wretches, yet it must have struck him forcibly that he was fortunate to be alive to witness the scene. For his part in the arrest of Fawkes, and also for his wife's care of the little Princess Mary, third daughter of the King, Knyvett was created Baron Escrik on July 4th, 1607, having previously been made a Privy Councillor. The Princess did not, however, so far as is known, ever live in "Downing Street."

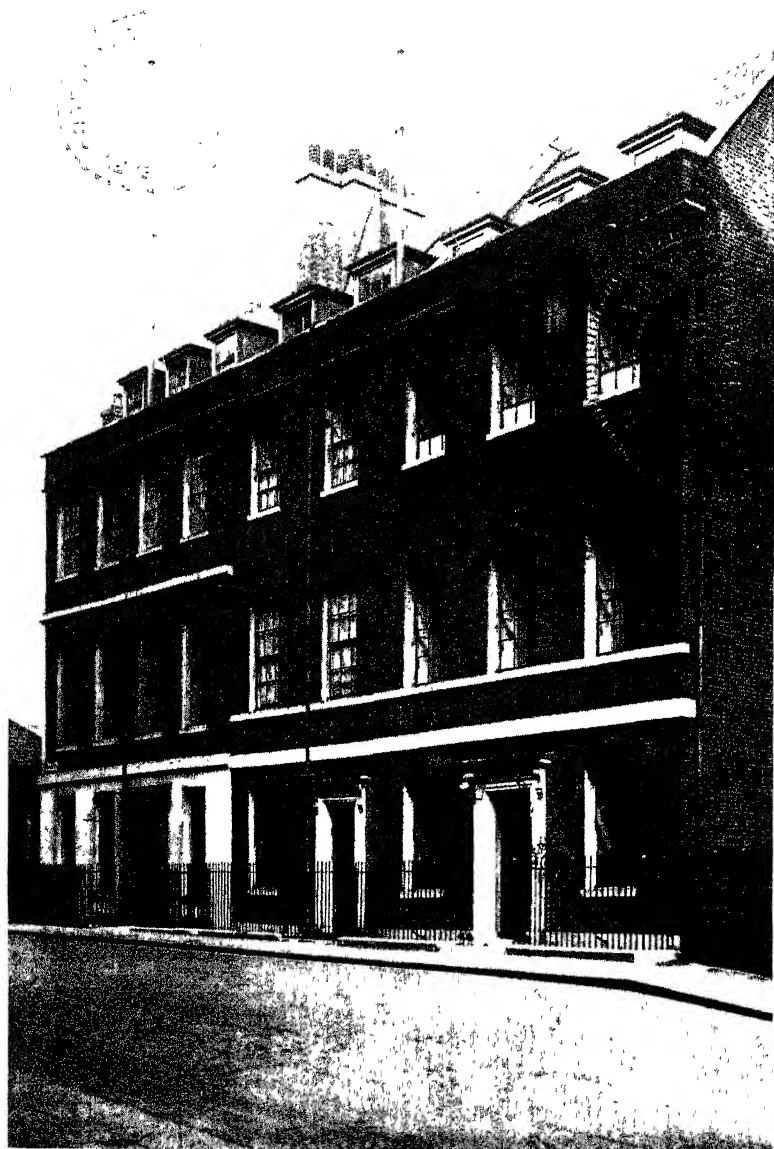
If the immediate surroundings of Lord Escrik's house were somewhat squalid, pleasant and picturesque scenes lay within three minutes of his door. At this time St. James's Fields accommodated one of the most

complete zoological gardens of the period. The zoo owed its existence to the King's love of wild life. Foreign monarchs wishing to make a present to James I would contribute an addition to his collection of animals.

For instance, the King of Savoy presented a leopard to King James, the Great Mogul sent him some antelopes, and the Czar of Muscovy added hawks and ermines. Perhaps the most magnificent addition to the menagerie came from the King of Spain, who gave camels and an elephant. In addition to these, roebuck, deer, elk and goats were plentiful, and Evelyn mentions "a Balearian crane." Within sight and sound of Knyvett's house many sporting events took place. It is probable that Knyvett often took part in the buck-hunting when hounds drew the coverts in St. James's Fields and the surrounding woodlands. No doubt he held special parties of his friends for the wrestling bouts and firework displays which took place within a stone's throw of his residence in "Downing Street."

The wrestling matches were, it is to be hoped, a little less bloodthirsty than those of Hubert de Burgh's time, and Sir Thomas's upper windows would provide excellent box-seats. The firework displays and the hunting must have caused some alarm to the inhabitants of the zoo.

In the canal in St. James's Fields the carp, which had already been there many years, were joined, about this time, by two young crocodiles which



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NOS 10 AND 11 DOWNING STREET



doubtless were most effective in keeping the urchins of those days from bathing. Rosamund's Pond, which was close to the site of Buckingham Palace and in those days was fed by the old Tyburn stream, lay in verdant seclusion among the trees. There many lovers met, and in its waters many disappointed in love ended their sorrows.

Probably Knyvett found his house, close to the Palace and so convenient to a courtier, a drain upon his purse. Between 1581 and 1604 he undertook extensive repairs, in consideration of which King James, on May 9th, 1604, presented him with a free lease for sixty years, to commence from his death. This concession was to be of more benefit to his legatees than to himself, but he received many grants of money during his lifetime. In 1612 he received £500 and in the following year a further £500.

Lord Knyvett is in prominence, from this date onwards, principally as a member of the Council of Queen Anne and a Warden of the Mint. He was present at nearly all State functions, and his wardrobe must have been considerable. It was then customary to celebrate notable events, birthdays, coronations and the like by buying a suit of clothes, and the best tailors of the day must often have made their way up the narrow alley that led to Knyvett House.

Thus for many years life flowed peacefully in the somewhat obscure quarter which was one day to develop into the Downing Street we now know. Much gaiety, some serious but comparatively trivial



business, and a pervading atmosphere of kindliness and goodwill, was then the condition of the one-time brewery, which was still to see its most astonishing changes.

One interesting incident, concerning this tranquil period and the pleasant people then living in the house, remains to be told. By a statute of Edward VI, enforced during the reign of Elizabeth by various proclamations, the eating of meat in Lent was forbidden. It was possible to avoid compliance with this order only by obtaining a special meat-eating licence, in applying for which it was necessary to produce a doctor's certificate attesting that a flesh diet was essential to one's health. The licence had to be paid for. A commoner was rated at 6s. 8d., a knight at 13s. 4d., but a peer of the realm had to pay £1 6s. 8d. In 1618 it appears that Lord Knyvett was in indifferent health, for it is on record that he secured a "flesh-eating licence" in that year. He was then an old man, and it seems probable that until his health weakened he had dutifully observed the regulations.

Lord Knyvett died on July 27th, 1622, leaving his widow the bulk of his property. His will is notable for its charm of thought and expression, and for the insight that it gives into his character :

"Consideringe with my selfe that I was borne to nothings but a vaine title of blood and name of eminent freindes, and that the little fortune of my presente estate hath wholie risen by godes

providence from my deceased mother and my liveinge and lovinge wife, by whose estat (though much wasted by me) I have been maynteyned, I hold myselfe bound in civill honestie to . . . requitt her exceedinge true love . . . as much as shall lye in my power to doe yt."

Sadly enough, his wife died in her "Downing Street" house a little over a month later. The property passed then to her niece, Elizabeth Hampden, mother of the famous John Hampden, and aunt of Oliver Cromwell.

Cromwell is known to have had a house in King Street, and letters written by him are headed from his lodgings at the Cockpit, Westminster. The expression "at the Cockpit" was used in those days as a general connotation for quite a large district in the neighbourhood of Whitehall on the west side. Hampden House was close to the old Cockpit which had been built by Henry VIII, and so it seems probable that, since Mrs. Hampden was his aunt, Cromwell occasionally lodged with her, and that he often visited the house destined for such fame in years to come.

During the occupation of Mrs. Hampden the house appears to have been in a good state of repair and was certainly a fine and extensive property. Doubtless much of the old Axe Brewery had survived alterations and additions. The main house was in three floors, there were several annexes and a very fine fruit and flower garden. A full and exact survey made in 1650 gives such a remarkably clear picture of the property

at this time that it is well worth reproduction verbatim :

“ All that Messuage or Tenem<sup>t</sup> scittuate in King Streete . . . built parte w<sup>th</sup> Bricke and part w<sup>th</sup> Tymber and Flemish walle and covered w<sup>th</sup> Tyle, consistinge of a Large and spacious hall, Wainscoted round, well Lighted, and Paved w<sup>th</sup> brick Pavem<sup>ts</sup>, two parl<sup>rs</sup> whereof one is Wainscoted round from the seelinge to ye floore, one Buttery, one Seller, one Large Kitchen well paved w<sup>th</sup> stone and well fitted and Joynted and well fitted w<sup>th</sup> dresser boords ; Alsoe one Large Pastery Roome, paved and joynted as aforesaid. And above stayres in the first story one Large and spacious dyneinge Roome, Wainscoted round from the Seelinge to the floore, well flored, Lighted and seeled, and fitted w<sup>th</sup> a faire Chimney w<sup>th</sup> a foote pace of Paynted Tyle in the same. Alsoe 6 more Roomes and 3 Closetts in the same flore all well Lighted and seeled. And in the second story 4 garretts. And in annother Rainge of buildinges called the old buildinges Two Chambers and one Closett and a stoole house there, and one Rainge of old buildinges standinge on the left hand comeinge in at ye gate, consistinge of 9 roomes belowe stayres and above stayres. And on the Right hand of ye gate at the comeinge in to the said house one other buildinge standinge next to the streete, consistinge of one Hall, one Kitchen, and a Closett, all well paved w<sup>th</sup> stone, and above stayres 3 Chambers and a Closett, whereof one is parte wainscoted, and the other parte

fitted for hangings. Alsoe one Court and two Large entryes or passages, and one large garden contayninge 252 feete of assize in length and 100 feete in breadth, the sd Large garden beinge fitted w<sup>th</sup> variety of Walle fruite and divers fruite Trees, Plants, Rootes and flowers, very pleasant to the eye and profitable for use. Alsoe severall handsom delightfull Gravelly Walkes, seats and arbors, the ground whereon th'aforesaid houses stand, together w<sup>th</sup> the Courts and garden, cont' by estimacon 397 feete of assize in Length, and ye garden 109 feete in breadth, and ye house 49 feete in breadth, abuttinge on Kinges Streete on the East, and St. James' Parke walle on ye west, and adioyninge north on the New gate house leadinge into King Street, and south on a house or Inn heretofore called the Peacocke now in ye occ. of Mrs. Hampden, and is worth per annum £90."

During this period young George Downing, who was to give his name to Mrs. Hampden's property and its immediate surroundings, was growing to manhood. Born in the year that Knyvett died, Downing was the son of a Puritan barrister who left the Inner Temple for Boston in 1638 when the boy was fifteen. Young George was sent to the newly founded Harvard and there he did well. Four years later he is recorded as being second on the list of first-class graduates. He began his career as a tutor at Harvard, in which capacity he was paid £4 per annum—a sum which he was to be receiving daily some

seven years later. This post did not satisfy him for long. Sailing for the West Indies, he toured the islands as a preacher. He returned to England in 1646.

If it be true that places gain some character from those who are associated with them, then in view of No. 10's history it is important that one should endeavour to get a true perspective on the character of Downing as a man. The events of his career, and the changes which took place in his time, are all factors which determine his contact with the street that was to bear his name and the building of those historic houses which were to line it. The Vicar of Bray and George Downing saw eye to eye on the manner in which radical changes should be met.

Just as No. 10 has served successively men with the most widely divergent views, so did Downing transfer his allegiance as necessity demanded. Thus history has dubbed him an unprincipled self-seeker, who would betray his dearest friend for an adequate consideration. But he gained this bad name for treachery and ingratitude in a comparatively commonplace manner for the times in which he lived. His first appointment was in the parliamentary army as Chaplain to Colonel Oakey's regiment of Round-heads ; after the Restoration, having transferred his allegiance to the King, he was responsible for Oakey's arrest in Holland and deportation to meet his death on an English gallows.

When Cromwell lived Downing served him well

and faithfully. When Charles II accepted his services he can have had no doubt of his future loyalty or he would not have considered trusting the man who had continually harassed exiled Royalists when acting as Cromwell's envoy at the Hague. Downing's rise to power, his wealth and the very astuteness that was shown in such ventures as the building of Downing Street, were accompanied by a strict adherence to the policy of loyally serving the man to whom he immediately owed his allegiance.

Some say that even this half-hearted loyalty was dictated largely by self-interest. For instance, Pepys in his Diary refers to Downing as "a perfidious rogue" and "a most ungrateful villain." But it is only fair to record that later Pepys himself changed his opinion of Downing. When in the year 1677 Downing was made Secretary to the Treasury Lords in succession to Sir Philip Warwick, Pepys had been in touch with him for some years, and expressed himself as particularly pleased at the appointment. Commenting on the matter, the diarist wrote that the Treasury Lords ". . . have done a great thing in it ; for he is a business active man, and values himself upon having of things well under his hand ; so that I am mightily pleased at their choice."

Nevertheless Pepys' earlier allusions to Downing's character are most often remembered, and probably they have done some injustice to his memory. Whatever his motives, Downing certainly served the country to best purpose in transferring allegiance to

Charles at a time when the King was sorely in need of able men.

In 1649 Cromwell had appointed Downing Scout-master-General to the Army. In this post he had control of the Intelligence Staff and bore much responsibility. His salary was £4 per day, though out of this money he had to pay any spies he employed. It was at this time that he began to accumulate the fortune which later was partly invested in the Downing Street property. He became known as economical and even mean, but he built up a brilliant organisation.

Events were now moving rapidly to the point where Downing's keen brain saw an opportunity of profit from acquiring property in the vicinity of Hampden House. The neighbourhood still showed no trace of the sobriety with which it is to-day associated in the mind of the world. It is difficult to realise as one stands in the modern Downing Street, under the stern eye of a policeman, that in the days of its founder the place was hard by the gayest spot in town and that it daily and nightly echoed to the cries of roysterers. The Cockpit during the reign of James I was used mainly for the royal sport of cock-fighting, but gradually it was used more and more frequently for the performance of plays. All sorts of bright entertainments were given in the building.

It is recorded that in 1608 a children's charity performance was given there. Child actors and prodigies were common features of the day. Great people had their own private troupes of players. The

Princess Elizabeth once lost a bet of an evening's entertainment to Edward Sackville, and accordingly diverted him at the Cockpit. In payment for this performance she presented her players with £5, but killed two birds with one stone by inviting the youthful Elector of the Palatinate to the show, at remarkably short notice. That the building must have been of ample proportions is shown by the fact that Cromwell once held a vocal and instrumental concert at the Cockpit which was attended by the Members of the House of Commons, whom he had been regaling with a feast at Whitehall.

Many plays of note were there acted before Royalty, among them Ben Jonson's *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, which was presented in 1660 before Charles II by the Duke of Albemarle. In those days the gay throng, with their feathered hats and costly and elaborate clothes, were the pick of fashionable Court society. What a contrast to-day presents, when one considers the respectability of Downing Street and the serious-mindedness and industry of those whose daily lives are bound up in it. In those olden days, too, commoners who came to look on at the doings of the brilliant Court took their refreshment and diversion at the Peacock Inn.

Probably on account of these facts Downing decided that the property would increase in value if controlled by a shrewd brain. Consequently, when in 1651 the Commissioner responsible for the 1650 survey of the Crown holdings near the Cockpit disposed of them to



William Procter and Robert Thorpe, he made it his business to watch the proceedings closely. When, shortly afterwards, Procter died, Downing seized the opportunity to buy Thorpe out. This was in November, 1654, when he was thirty-two years old.

Downing was too busy at the time to devote much attention to his new holding. When he became Equerry to Oliver Cromwell he had to go as Envoy-Extraordinary to intercede with Mazarin on behalf of the Vaudois peasants massacred by the Duke of Savoy's troops. On his return he became one of the Four Tellers of the Receipt of the Exchequer, a post that was something of a sinecure.

In 1657, however, he was again sent abroad, this time as Resident to the Netherlands, where part of his work consisted in organising an espionage department to watch the movements of exiled Royalists on the Continent. This was indeed a fortunate post to occupy at the time when it became obvious that the Stuarts would return to the Throne.

When Downing realised that the Restoration would not long be delayed his astute mind grasped the desirability of establishing his credit in the Royalist camp. He used Tom Howard, a highly placed Royalist whom he had previously bought as a spy in the interests of the Commonwealth, to work as his intermediary in negotiations with the exiled Charles. Thus we find that Downing anticipated the turn of events with sufficient certainty to undertake much counter-espionage work for the King. Much

of this was concerned with carrying avowals of loyalty to Charles from people who held high positions in the Commonwealth. But Downing's cunning forethought and calculated prudence did not avert, on the occasion of the Restoration in 1660, the automatic annulment of his interest in the property which he had bought from Thorpe. He found high favour with Charles, however, for on May 21st, 1660, he was knighted at Breda. So it is not astonishing to find him shortly in negotiation for the recovery of his property.

His negotiations did not bear immediate fruit, for it was not until three years later that he was able to obtain a lease. In the meantime he returned to Holland as Envoy-Extraordinary for Charles II at a yearly salary of nearly £2000, a sum which he was wise and clever enough to get paid quarterly in advance.

It was on February 3rd, 1664, that he was eventually granted a ninety-nine years' lease of the property covering part of the site of the present Downing Street. He was not then allowed to build farther west than the Cockpit. His holding appears to have been bounded on the north side by the apartments of the Duke of Albemarle which faced upon the modern Whitehall, and on the south side by Duffin's Alley, now covered by Government offices built in 1825 during the Soane alterations. The most important clause in this lease was that which granted Downing the reversion of the Knyvett property. It will be

remembered that, in consideration of expenses to which he had been put in repairing the property, Knyvett had been granted a sixty years posthumous lease.

As he died in 1622, it was not until 1682 that Downing entered into possession of the entire property. Before this event, however, further building took place adjoining Hampden House. The new building is of particular importance in the history of No. 10.

Up to the year 1671 the history of the present site has been almost entirely concerned with the Hampden House property, but in this year a new factor arises. The present No. 10 includes the greater part of the site of a house begun in March, 1671, for the second Duke of Buckingham. Downing Street to-day runs roughly east and west. The Knyvett property was at the west or Park end, and bounded on the north by the lodgings of the Duke of Albemarle, who had staunchly remained in residence during the Great Plague of 1664-5, when the rest of the Court had fled Whitehall.

It was by the site of these lodgings that the house was built for George Villiers, son of the Duke murdered by Feltham. Buckingham had already passed the peak of his career. He was one of the richest men in England and at times high in the King's favour, but had lost credit following his duel with the Earl of Shrewsbury, who died from his wounds, and his subsequent co-habitation with the Countess of Shrewsbury, the cause of the quarrel.

Between 1670 and 1672, acting as the King's envoy to Louis XIV, Buckingham concluded treaties for a war with Holland. In April, 1673, his new house was completed, when he was organising and training troops at Blackheath. The new building involved the demolition and alteration of some of the existing premises at the Cockpit, those which were on the Park side being taken down, as also was the gallery which joined them to the Cockpit theatre.

The mansion which arose in their place was an apparently solid brick building of the period, with characteristic bay windows. Foundations were dug for a wall on the Whitehall side, or "backeparte," and items in the builders' account include such as "covering w<sup>th</sup> lead ye cantalaver Eaves & all ye hipps of ye rooffe . . . 21 squares & 56 foote of Roofing : 167 foote of lintelling : 10 oken mantletrees & tassels : 74 window lights : 8 lucerne windows : 106 fo<sup>t</sup> of Cantalever Eaves : two Architrave doorecases & battened doores with two lights over each of them. . . ." Indeed a suitably magnificent mansion for a Duke.

Probably Buckingham's reason for building this house was that he wished to gain great political power, but if that was so it helped him little, for in January, 1674, fierce attacks made upon him in Parliament ensured his downfall, an event which coincided closely with the mysterious collapse of his new home. There is no record stating just how much the building suffered in 1675, but only three years after the house

was completed it was extensively rebuilt. In explanation of the unexpected collapse of a large part of this building on the site of No. 10 it is notable that subsidence often occurred in London in spots where houses were built on the sites of ancient ditches or rivers.

A remarkable instance is found in the Old Bailey, which stands over ground where once ran part of the Roman ditch that circled London. When the building was re-erected in 1770 an extra cost of nearly £50,000 was incurred because the foundations had to be sunk forty feet deep, to ensure security. Nearby the Downing Street site both the Cockpit and the Tennis Court, which actually fell in while it was being built, caused considerable trouble.

No. 10 and its predecessors have always been expensive to maintain in good repair, and have needed frequent rebuilding. Though this fact may be attributed in part to the marshy nature of the ground thereabouts in ancient times, when corroborated by the behaviour of the Cockpit and of the Tennis Court, it seems to lend confirmation to our theory that the northerly arm of the Tyburn stream once ran close by the site of the present-day Downing Street. Buckingham's building appears to have been a stout enough example of Tudor architecture. It was brick built, well roofed and had plenty of oaken timbers inside and out.

The next reference we have to the house tells how, between 1675-6, one Thomas Duppa was entrusted

with alterations required for the occupation, on their marriage, of the Earl of Lichfield and the Lady Charlotte Fitzroy. Charlotte was the daughter of the famous Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, and Charles II. The Royal romance had begun about seventeen years before Charlotte's marriage, and she was one of several children. Barbara, that romantic, extravagant, blue-eyed, auburn-haired gambler, was a brilliant woman. Despite her "baby face," she knew what she was about. She threatened to carry one of her children, of the King's begetting, to Whitehall and there to dash its brains out if Charles did not acknowledge paternity. In 1674 she obtained a grant of £1200 secret service money for her daughter's trousseau.

In February, 1677, Charlotte, then a child only twelve years of age, was wedded to the Earl of Lichfield and they forthwith moved into their "Downing Street" residence. Lady Lichfield earned a reputation for beauty at an early age and, as time went on, she added to that a reputation for fertility that ranked high, even in those days. Her husband, formerly Sir Edward Lee, was twenty years old at the time of their wedding and had been created an earl some three years previously. In the days of this young couple Buckingham House knew many tranquil, gracious hours. Probably the alley of Knyvett's day had now been widened, for we find the street upon which the house looked described as being a pretty, open place, having at the Park end four or five large and well-

built houses with "terras walks" fit for persons of honour and quality.

High diplomacy was still in the future, so far as this spot was concerned ; hustle was yet unknown, and here, on the outskirts of London City, noise seldom intruded. Sometimes watchers at the windows of the house smiled at the laughter of a sauntering figure, indolently jesting with some favoured companion—King Charles on his way to bandy wit with Nell Gwynne over the wall of her house in the Mall. Later, came the voice of a flower-seller hopefully crying her "Sweet violets" outside the door of the great house with its young and sympathetic mistress.

But ambition had marked the spot, and soon its peace was destroyed. Uneasiness grew with the approach of the year 1682. Rumours of the intentions of Sir George Downing were disquieting to minds disliking change in customs and manners which they regarded as the "old order." But they could do nothing more than complain, in the bored manner of the "exquisite" of the day, that the fellow Downing could be no gentleman to contemplate the changes that rumour said he intended.

In this case rumour told no more than the truth, for on entering in 1682 into full possession of the properties detailed in his earlier lease, Downing got busily to work. No longer could the Lichfields and their aristocratic neighbours shelter happily behind the grant made to Sir Thomas Knyvett and inherited by Mrs. Hampden. Many restrictions upon



MR. WILLIAM PITT





Downing's actions were removed in the year 1682.

Formerly the old Cockpit had formed a boundary beyond which he must not build. This Cockpit, the old Tudor one which stood on ground now forming part of the Horse Guards Parade, was pulled down between 1665 and 1670, and by a lease of February 10th, 1682, Downing was allowed to build over the site, provided he did not go nearer to the wall of St. James's Park than fourteen feet. It was assured that any house on the site that is now occupied by No. 10 should be pleasing to the eye and kept neat and tidy.

Downing's lease stipulated that any houses built at the Park end of the alley-way then known as Hamlin's Yard must have agreeable frontages. That part of the Park wall which was contiguous to his property was his responsibility ; and not only did he have to see to keeping it in good condition, but he was obliged to ornament it with statues and flower-pots. About this time he built the house at the bottom of the street which in much later days served for some time as the Colonial Office. This department in those days found temporary accommodation in the new Cockpit.

Downing had leased the site of the old Peacock Inn from the Abbey in 1680. Now he let a considerable portion of this and the Hampden House property on forty-year building leases. It may be supposed that this activity did not meet with

he approval of established residents, and soon we hear plaintive murmurings from the Lichfields, who undoubtedly regarded the new improvements as an unmitigated nuisance and in execrable taste.

In 1684 Lady Lichfield was anxious to build the wall of their property considerably higher than it had formerly stood in order to maintain her privacy. In that year a gift of £200 from the King is recorded, in connection with some repair or other work at his daughter's house on the site of No. 10, and it is quite possible that this sum was intended for rebuilding the wall. In writing to Charlotte, however, Charles pointed out that it was needless for the wall to encroach upon the convenience of her sister Anne, Countess of Sussex. Sister Anne's house appears to have been the one which then stood on the site occupied to-day by No. 12 Downing Street. It was the corner house, but it is not known whether the Countess of Sussex was ever actually in occupation.

When Downing died in 1684 no respite came to the people who so strongly objected to his plans of development. Building leases had been granted and so the work went forward. Amongst property mentioned in Downing's Will are notably : "four great houses, being parcell of the premises held by the Crowne, fronting St. James Park west and north." Of these, one house occupied most of the street frontage of what is now No. 10 and part of the site of No. 11. Another house occupied the remainder of

the site of No. 11, and the other houses corresponded to to-day's Nos. 12 and 14.

Downing's Will particularly mentions : " My house in or neare King Street . . . lately called Hampden House, which I hold by a long Lease from the Crowne, and Peacock Court very neare adjoyning which I hold by lease from the Collegiate Church of St. Peter, Westminster, all which are now demolished and rebuilt or rebuilding and called Downing Street."

Even at this comparatively late date Downing Street and its immediate neighbourhood still retained distinct traces of the ancient wild character of Thorney Island. In 1661 Charles II, expecting the arrival of his wife, had to request Parliament to " quickly pass such laws as are before you that she may not find Whitehall surrounded by water." King Street was still a deeply rutted track at which a modern carter would look askance. For the comfort and convenience of the nobility and gentry who used it much in their visits to the Palace, the ruts were filled in with faggots. But the monarchs of two hundred and fifty years ago must have suffered an astonishingly uneasy ride between Whitehall and the Houses of Parliament.

Nevertheless, the neighbourhood generally was beginning to feel the benefit of various improvements. The householders on the main street were now compelled by law to lighten the evening gloom by displaying lanterns outside their dwellings between six and nine o'clock. Nine o'clock was the usual time for all good people to go to bed. But even when this

order had been put into effect Downing Street must have been a dark and uninviting place after nightfall.

During the daytime, however, the inhabitants still had at their disposal the amenities of St. James's Park, which had escaped the fate that befell other parks in 1652, when they were sold for the Commonwealth. Charles II did not maintain James' menagerie, but he had a noted fondness for bird life and stocked the park with a number of imported water-fowl. It is recorded by Evelyn in 1664 that a pelican and an astrachan stork were to be found there.

After the Revolution in 1688 the Earl and Countess of Lichfield, who were ardent sympathisers with the Stuart cause, retired from Downing Street into the country. Henry Nassau, Count d'Auverquerque, took over the lease in 1690, after his arrival in England with William as Master of Horse. This tenancy seems to have been uneventful. Whitehall was endangered by a fire that broke out in the Duchess of Portsmouth's lodgings in April, 1691, but Downing Street appears to have escaped.

Lord Overkirk, to use the Count's adopted English name, died in 1708, but his wife continued in residence until her death in 1720. George I then gave the house to Caspar von Bothmar, the Hanoverian Minister who was for all practical purposes the leader of the Junta that advised the King on matters of policy.

The house was at that time No. 5 in the street under the old numbering, which lasted until the rebuilding carried out by Sir John Soane a century

later. Then the houses were renumbered and the old No. 5 became the No. 10 with which we are familiar to-day. Bothmar occupied the house until his death in 1732. During Bothmar's occupation one of the most familiar landmarks of the neighbourhood disappeared. The "New Gate" of Whitehall by Downing Street was demolished. It had also been known as "Westminster Gate," and the old structure had for some years been badly in need of repair.

In 1708 it bore the Queen's arms, which must have been newly affixed, and no doubt contrasted with dilapidated figures, roses and other ornamentations. Like the more famous Holbein Gate, it had four towers. Its southern side was "adorned with pilasters and entablature of the Ionic order." It is interesting to note that during the year before the demolition of this old gateway William Stowe refers to "Downing Street, W." in his *Remarks on London*. This extensive street directory is notable as being the first attempt to indicate districts. To all street names were appended "L" for London (City), "W" for Westminster, or "S" for Southwark.

At the close of the seventeenth century officialdom was beginning to make itself felt in the neighbourhood of Downing Street. It is recorded that in 1698 there was a fire in Whitehall which destroyed several Government departments. These were found fresh accommodation in the new Cockpit. The Treasury moved in during February, and room was found also in the building for the Secretary of State and the

Council. One would suppose that these official bodies would occupy much space, yet they seem to have left sufficient room for "an apartment for the King when he come to Town." This new Cockpit, built by Charles II, stood south of the one of Tudor days on the site of which Downing had built.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century Colonial and Privy Council affairs were also conducted there. Sidney, Earl of Godolphin, First Lord of the Treasury between 1684 and 1685 and Lord High Treasurer from 1702 to 1710, is recorded as having sat at the Cockpit three or four times a week to transact Treasury business. During Queen Anne's reign the Cabinet, a committee of the Privy Council, met there occasionally, always, curiously enough, on Sundays. Temporary quarters were also found in the same building for the "Office of Trade and Plantations" which fulfilled the functions of the present-day Board of Trade and Colonial Office, then non-existent. Later the Plantation Office moved to the corner of King Street.

When the building leases granted by Sir George Downing expired in 1722, the then owner, Charles Downing, let part of the property to Henry Cornwall for thirty-eight years for use as a stables. The remainder he leased to one James Steadman. Steadman built a house on part of his leasehold which in time was absorbed into No. 11 Downing Street. The other part was in the occupation of a Mr. Chicken, who was bought out by the Crown when rebuilding in preparation for Walpole's occupation.

Cornwall's lease was purchased by the Crown in 1733, and two years later rebuilding and amalgamation had combined to produce, out of that part of the old Hampden House property represented by Mr. Chicken's residence and the Cornwall stables, together with the house recently occupied by Count Bothmar, the complete whole—No. 10 Downing Street. This metamorphosis took place between the years 1732 and 1735. Then Sir Robert Walpole moved in. He had been offered the new house as a gift by George II. He accepted the courtesy on condition that the house should be entailed in perpetuity to the office of First Lord of the Treasury.

Sir George Downing had now been dead some fifty years, but his family still retained a considerable interest in the neighbourhood. It is recorded that a renewed lease was granted in 1752 to Sir Jacob Gerrard Downing. This excluded property in which Horace Walpole had obtained an interest in 1738, and also No. 10.

No. 11 Downing Street, now the official residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, did not gain this distinction till a much later date. Indeed, for the first hundred years of No. 10's official existence many more Chancellors than First Lords were housed beneath the roof of No. 10. Originally No. 11 consisted of two houses, the one built by James Steadman in 1723 and another farther to the west.

Between 1727 and 1732 Steadman's house was occupied by John Scrope, one of Walpole's most



intimate friends and strongest supporters. Judge Scrope held office as Secretary of the Treasury between 1724 and his death in 1752. The older house to the west was occupied between 1724 and 1732 by the Earl of Orrery, scholar, soldier, and patron of the sciences. It is curious that between 1732 and 1738 both houses that were to form No. 11 appear to have been empty, but probably they were in a bad state of repair.

Thus at last, in 1735, Downing Street achieves the seal of respectability. It holds the residence of the Prime Minister and has seen the beginning of constitutional monarchy. More and more offices of State are finding their way into its neighbourhood. It is true that, not far away, Westminster remains a filthy slum, with ways so narrow that people living in the closely-built houses can, when so disposed, empty their slops into each other's windows, while washing hangs on poles out of the reach of thieving urchins who patter along the garbage-paved streets. But time will mend these matters. Meanwhile Downing Street looks back on the past, with its memories of brewery and tavern, jeweller's shop and Cockpit, courtier and courtesan, feeling that at last it has settled down.

## CHAPTER IV

### “CONTRASTS”

The Queen to breakfast—Walpole and the development of the Cabinet System—Cuckold's Comfort—Sinecure's nest—The Honeymooners—High Finance—Bawdy House.

THE next phase in the development of No. 10 Downing Street witnessed two astonishingly contrasting activities. On the one hand it saw the grave deliberations attendant upon the birth of the Cabinet System ; on the other, debauchery in the persons of as wild a band of wastrels as have been bred in London. Things had changed since No. 10 had been the residence of Caspar von Bothmar—once the virtual ruler of England—and when No. 10 received Walpole the Hanoverian Junta had become more and more unpopular, and the very security of the Hanoverian succession was in the balance.

It should be mentioned that although for purposes of convenience and clarity the old house in Downing Street is here described as No. 10, it did not officially receive this title until many years later. In the days now under discussion it was usual for houses to be known by the names of their owners. No. 10 Downing Street in its earlier years is never referred to by its number—then No. 5—but either clumsily as

“The First Lord of the Treasury’s house in Downing Street,” or “The Chancellor of the Exchequer’s house in Downing Street.”

In much earlier years it had been Hampden House, now it also took the name of its first official tenant, and for seven years was known as Walpole House. It had passed through many vicissitudes and growing-pains. Different phases had marked its adolescence—adventure, religion, beer and romance in full measure—but now with the bestowal of its official dignity and the arrival of Sir Robert it may be said to have come of age.

During Walpole’s seven years’ occupation little spectacular happened in No. 10, but the statesman’s association with the house is of the greatest significance in the political history of the country. When No. 10 and Sir Robert “took over,” the affairs of the country were in an astonishingly unsatisfactory state.

During Bothmar’s occupation of the house England had been completely disorganised by an orgy of fantastic speculation occasioned by the South Sea Company. This organisation had a capital of 38 millions, and actually took over the National Debt. It was purely a holding company with glorious expectations, and nothing in the way of actual business apart from the Assiento trade. This had been granted by Spain in 1713, but amounted to a turnover of only a few thousands per annum. In similar vein many other companies were formed, with

no object other than the fleecing of the foolish, not the least remarkable among them being the famous company formed “ for a very profitable purpose which shall not at present be disclosed.”

Downing Street must then have housed many of the speculators, for there was not a street in London at the time where stocks and shares were not eagerly discussed. As in other “ boom ” years, the market was grossly inflated by the indiscriminate buying of people who were not, in normal times, interested in stocks and shares at all. The very housemaids at No. 10 may well have had their money in the market.

It is more than probable that the tradesmen who called at the house were in the plunge, for even scavengers, potmen, tinkers, soldiers and sailors rushed to try and turn their little savings into big money, in concerns of the most blatantly dubious nature. The subsequent crash brought much unrest and rioting. Anyone who looked like a stockbroker was liable to have his coach overturned with himself underneath it, and those who had made fortunes and “ got out from under ” before the crash came were often pelted with rotten eggs when they went out for an airing in their ornate new coaches.

Before he came to No. 10 Walpole had been First Lord of the Treasury twice, the second time in 1722, when he restored order and stability in the slump-ridden country. His championship of the Hanoverian Succession was invaluable at a time when each man blamed the other and all blamed the Crown. At this

moment of crisis there came the staunchest support for the House of Hanover from the house in Downing Street. No. 10 was a solid rock to which was moored the established order. Walpole had a great faith in the benefit to England of the continuance of the dynasty on the throne, and though he was not a brilliantly imaginative man his solid common sense, and the importance he laid on detail, gave the country confidence at an extremely critical period.

With the coming of Walpole, No. 10 became the scene of a series of visits from Queen Caroline, which were particularly interesting on account of their extreme informality. Peculiarly enough, they usually took place in the early morning, and provide a striking contrast in the public and private life of No. 10 at this period. To-day it would be impossible to imagine that King Edward or Queen Mary would call upon the Prime Minister for breakfast, but this was Caroline's practice in visiting Walpole.

In the early eighteenth century breakfast was a far more important meal than it usually is to-day. It followed several hours of work, or exercise, after rising at five or six o'clock. The Queen would sit down to table with Lady Walpole, while Sir Robert stood behind her chair. The first course would be served by Walpole himself, who would then leave, go to the next room and sit down to his own meal in company with those attendants of the Royal Household whom the Queen had brought with her.

The ceremoniousness of this procedure was, how-

ever, in striking comparison to Walpole's method of address to the Queen in private. Those were coarse days, by our later standards, and the walls of No. 10 rang often to loud and vivid oaths and jests. Everyday conversation was embellished with colourful epithets and profanities which would more than shock those who in these enlightened times still consider themselves broadminded. Again we have a striking contrast to the No. 10 of to-day, where the Prime Minister, whether at ease or in the midst of a vital discussion in the Cabinet Room, hardly indulges in the luxury of strong language. Our twentieth-century statesmen at their most violent cannot compare with Walpole in his gentlest moments.

When the Queen came to No. 10 to converse with Sir Robert he did not spare her blushes, though we have no actual record that she felt at any time the need to blush. Probably she was well accustomed to little oddities of expression such as those to which Sir Robert might give vent. In any case, he was a man of wit and keen intelligence, and the Queen was not slow to copy from him metaphors that attracted her. For instance, how can we doubt where she heard such remarks as that famous one which concerns not hanging every hound that ran a little slower than the rest, provided in the main it kept up with the pack.

Queen Caroline's intelligence was greatly superior to the King's, and so her visits to No. 10 and her many heart-to-heart talks with bluff Sir Robert Walpole

were of great importance. Caroline fully recognised the Prime Minister's ability and his value as an ally. She listened readily to his commonsense views on policy and, later, when opportunity offered, used her influence with the King to further Walpole's purposes. She was subtle in her methods, well knowing her husband's stubborn and overbearing nature.

George II did not understand the people he ruled, nor did he greatly desire to do so. He had few ideas and no imagination. Caroline would therefore gently suggest some point she wished to make, and then listen patiently to the tirade on how little she knew, which followed inevitably. George would rant on and on until eventually he worked his mind round to produce, as his own, Caroline's idea, which originally had emanated from No. 10 Downing Street. Thus Walpole and Caroline worked together, and together ruled Britain.

Walpole had long clearly perceived that it was for the good of the country that all members of the Ministry should work together, sinking individual views in minor matters. He had worked consistently to achieve this end and in consequence, before the death of George I, had made enemies of some of his ablest colleagues, men like Carteret and Pulteney. But No. 10's influence had become increasingly strong, though it may seem strange to us that so vital a feature of our present fashion of Government—the Cabinet system—should have been cradled in this incongruous atmosphere, and that its basic principles were probably

evolved as Walpole lay back in his chair with his feet on the mantelpiece.

Many and bitter were the attacks made upon No. 10 when Walpole, pressing his plans for the more efficient running of the country, brought forward his Excise scheme. The Prime Minister had spent many exacting hours in Downing Street working out the details of this idea which was to benefit the consumer by cheapening his purchases, and to stimulate trade by making London a free port. But he was not to put the scheme into operation, even though its provisions were so basically logical that most of them have since been put into effect.

Much vivid opposition came from the *Craftsman*, a paper sponsored by Pulteney and Bolingbroke. No. 10's occupant was caricatured again and again. For example, he was shown sitting in a carriage drawn by "that monster" the Excise—a six-headed dragon. One of the dragon's heads is pictured as swallowing a sheep, another is making short work of some hams, three more are sharing between them a miscellany of pots, tankards, pipes and tobacco, while the sixth vomits a stream of money into Walpole's lap.

As a result of many such attacks the country became thoroughly excited, and from John o' Groats to Land's End rang the execrations against Downing Street and all its doings. Pamphlets and cartoons of the most offensive nature were widely distributed. They were better suited to the tastes of the times than the newspaper, which, as a political weapon, was only



beginning to be felt. Sometimes they were even made up as fans—useful to cool brows heated by argument.

The only newspaper that supported the Administration was the *Daily Gazetteer* and this organ was not by any means as effective in the protection of No. 10 as others were in their attack. It had come into being in the same year that No. 10 received Walpole, being a merger of the *London Journal*, the *Free Briton* and the *Daily Courant*.

Probably as a result of Queen Caroline's influence George stood solidly behind his Minister, but Walpole bowed to the storm. He "would not be the man to enforce taxes at the price of blood." When Walpole could no longer stand by the Excise plans he had so vigorously pushed forward, the enthusiasm of the people knew no bounds. No. 10's defeat was celebrated by bonfires all over the country and a cheering mob surrounded the House of Commons. But No. 10's abandonment of the plans did nothing to alleviate its unpopularity.

An effigy of Walpole was burnt in Fleet Street, and there must have been many demonstrations in Downing Street. People in those days were far less restrained in expressing their feelings and gave vent to their hatred and contempt in no uncertain manner. No. 10 was the butt of much decaying vegetable produce, and the front doorstep of the house was frequently soiled with refuse and the expectorations of the rabble.



FREDERICK LORD NORTH



Throughout these stormy times Walpole maintained his sense of humour. He was next accused of making No. 10 a clearing-house of bribery and corruption of many kinds. Indeed, “ Downing Street Influence ” was a popular catch phrase. There was some small foundation for these attacks since traffic in appointments was unquestionably a feature of Walpole’s occupation. Many were the strange requests for appointments, some of them merely sinecures, that poured into No. 10 to tickle the imagination of its master. For example, the house must have resounded to Walpole’s hearty laughter when he read the petition presented at No. 10 by one Joseph Mitchell, asking for the Governorship of Duck Island (in St. James’s Park), at the reasonable pension of £100 per annum, and from which the following lines are quoted :

“ What princely pleasure, in that envied scene,  
To hold high empire o’er the peopled green !  
Each rosy morn the rising sun to wait,  
And walk, with him, around my orb, in state !

My subject ducks should watch my gracious will,  
And passive geese bequeath me every quill.  
To each, in order, traversing my land,  
I’d toss due blessings, with impartial hand.

I for return, will yearly homage pay,  
And hail the rising of thy natal day.  
Not only this—but, now and then afford  
A tench, or duck, to dignify thy board.”

At this period all No. 10’s neighbours were not by any means respectable, as “ respectability ” would be

measured to-day. Morality was at a low ebb in 1736. The country abounded in gin shops, and there were not a few within easy call of No. 10. On their littered floors it was not uncommon for men and women to drop dead as a result of their excesses. It would be surprising if some of the servants who ministered to the house did not occasionally return to it more than merry, from off-day carousals.

The grooms and lackeys from No. 10 at that time would in any event have found alcoholism inexpensive on their wages, and may even have penetrated to that famous "strong water" shop in Southwark which announced in a notice outside: "Drunk for a penny—dead drunk for tuppence—clean straw for nothing." Which seems to indicate that the idyllic state of besotted stupor was within the reach of the humblest servitor.

Prohibition by the Gin Act was the usual futile farce. Spirits were hawked around the streets under such fanciful names as "Cuckold's Comfort," "Lady's Delight," and even "Gripe Waters." The gin shops near Downing Street and elsewhere closed down to reopen immediately as "chemists," doing a lively trade in "medicine." Not only was the Act impossible of enforcement, but its worst consequence lay in the springing up of troops of common informers.

In 1737 No. 10 lost its most loyal supporter with the death of Queen Caroline. When she realised that death was close on her and that she would no more

visit the friendly, welcoming house in Downing Street to take counsel with her most trusted adviser, she sent for Sir Robert to her bedside and took leave of him. “ My good Sir Robert,” she said, “ you see me in a very indifferent situation. I have nothing to say to you, but to commend the King, and my children, and the kingdom to your care.”

With the Queen’s death Walpole knew that his influence at Court must wane. His influence had always been thrown whole-heartedly upon the side of peace, but with the attacks of the Opposition upon his policy in regard to Spain growing ever fiercer he found increasing difficulty in keeping Britain out of war. The Opposition, anxious to see Walpole out of No. 10 and power, realised that to force us into war would be the surest means to this end. The people were incited by all manner of pamphlets, Walpole was caricatured as keeping the British lion tame while a Spaniard cut its claws. At length the Spaniards, in boarding a British vessel to search for contraband, cut off the ear of the famous Captain Robert Jenkins and committed other cruelties.

Following this event, the Opposition stirred up great agitation. No. 10 became more and more isolated, surrounded by enemies. Walpole was attacked on all sides. He was represented in cartoons as spending most of his time in No. 10 at the delights of the table and the bottle, to the considerable inflation of his paunch. His person was held up to ridicule, and the power centred in No. 10 Downing Street was

the object of the wildest attacks, Walpole being portrayed as a Great Colossus.

The severe calm of the house's frontage had a match in the unruffled spirit with which Walpole met these attacks. The dignity of manner and the force of argument that had always characterised his speeches were not disturbed even in the critical times immediately preceding his fall. Indeed, over the beauty and adornment of No. 10 he seemed to take more concern than over his own difficulties. The walls of the house carried many of the best contemporary works of art, for its occupant was a connoisseur, and while fighting bitter political opposition he found time to be worried over a picture by Domenichino which he had bought and which had been delayed on its way over from Italy.

Walpole feared that a war with Spain would quickly develop into a conflict with France, which in turn would certainly give rise to a Jacobite rebellion. At first he defied the demand for war. He should have resigned, but instead of doing this in 1739 he eventually declared war on Spain. Little success attended the opening of the conflict and Walpole eventually lost his parliamentary majority. On February 3rd, 1742, the King requested that Parliament should adjourn for a fortnight. On the 9th Sir Robert was created Earl of Orford and he resigned two days later.

No. 10 had also been the home of Horace Walpole, Sir Robert's brother, during his occupation. Horace had a great love for the house and some of his happiest

moments were spent sitting at his desk overlooking the Park. He it was that earned the nickname of the “ Balancing Master,” for he did much work for his brother in the capacity of negotiator.

Samuel Sandys was to be the next occupant of No. 10, and he was, according to Horace, in a great hurry to move into the house. One of Walpole’s most vigorous opponents, he made an unsuccessful attempt at his overthrow in 1741. Horace was very sorry to have to leave this pleasant house, and it was with something more than mere annoyance at the trouble of moving that their belongings were packed up. Doubtless he would have been only too pleased if it had been in the first place accepted as a gift. Leaving the house may indeed have been a greater regret to the Walpoles than parting with power and position. If a house could have feelings, surely No. 10 would have regretted parting with these good-humoured, even-tempered people.

No. 10 had indeed been offered to Walpole by the King as a gift, but George’s only other present to the man who did so much for him was a diamond—so badly flawed as to be almost worthless. But though Walpole had not accepted the gift of No. 10 his occupation as First Lord gave the house seven years of eventful and vitally important life that were the foundation of its growing power. The value of the work which Walpole did during his life in Downing Street is adequately summed up in the tribute : “ Pitt inspired the nation ; without Walpole the



nation would have been incapable of evoking or of answering his appeal." Dr. Johnson said that Walpole was a Minister given by the King to the people ; Pitt a Minister given by the people to the King.

Equally well could it be said that though No. 10 had been the gift of the King to his First Lord of the Treasury, that gift marked the change in the entire relationship of Monarch and Minister. For many years kings were yet largely to dictate to No. 10 what should or should not be done, but slowly and surely No. 10 altered matters until it became the real fountain-head of our Constitutional Government.

Samuel Sandys, Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom No. 10 now had to take in exchange for the boisterous Sir Robert, was a man of unpleasing character. Of him Horace Walpole said that he " never laughed but once, and that was when his best friend broke his thigh." And to clear Horace of the charge of uttering harsh judgment there is the opinion of Lord Chesterfield, who remarked that Sandys was " one whose talents were so low that nothing but servile application could preserve him from universal contempt."

Sandys was remarkable for his inconsistency. Though a Whig, he was in constant opposition to Walpole. In the House of Commons he earned the name of the " Motion Maker," from his repeated introduction of the Place Bill, to limit the number of civil and military officers in the House. While at No. 10 as Chancellor of the Exchequer Sandys gave

a signal example of his inconstancy by opposing the introduction of this Place Bill, formerly so dear to his heart when on the opposition side.

In addition to the Chancellorship, he also held office as Privy Councillor in the administration of Lord Wilmington. Sandys had come to Downing Street because Wilmington, although Prime Minister, had not wished to occupy No. 10. Thus was established a precedent for the disposal of the house when the First Lord of the Treasury did not require it.

Wilmington—" that most formal, solemn man in the world, but a great lover of private debauchery "—was not in office long, but Sandys' stay in No. 10 continued for some little while even after he was out of office. On September 20th, 1743, Sandys was created a baron and made Cofferer of the Household. His Chancellorship was not notable, except perhaps for the repeal of the Gin Act and the cutting down of duties on spirits.

Henry Pelham, who was Prime Minister from 1743 until 1754, followed the lead of his predecessor in not using No. 10 as his private residence. But he did not allot the house to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Departing from this precedent, he treated it as a perquisite of office and allowed it to be occupied in succession by two of his sons-in-law. Thus for a short time political disputation was rarely heard within its walls.

From 1745 until 1753 the casual investigator might suppose that five different people came to live in the

house. It was the home and official residence of the Comptroller of the Customs of the Port of London. The Auditor of the Exchequer lived at No. 10. So did the Cofferer of the Household. Apart from these, it was occupied by the Lord-Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire and a Lord of the Bedchamber.

It would hardly seem possible that there should be enough room for the offices and living apartments of so many noble gentlemen. But the difficulty was got over in a simple way. There was little real difficulty in housing them for each of the gentlemen who held these honoured posts was the same man—Henry Fiennes Clinton, Ninth Earl of Lincoln. No. 10 was indeed the home of sinecures. Lincoln was the nephew as well as the son-in-law of Pelham, and was later to become the Duke of Newcastle, for the then Duke's estates were entailed in his favour.

Horace Walpole, fond as he had been, and still was, of No. 10, had not much use for those who came to it when he and his brother left. Of Lincoln's Auditorship he wrote on April 2nd, 1751: "Mr. Pelham had affected to be willing to retire with this post, which is at least eight thousand pounds a year, and a sinecure for life. The King desired him not to take it himself, and that dutyfull minister obeyed; that is, he held it in the name of Lord Lincoln, who was his nephew and son-in-law, adopted heir to the Duke of Newcastle, and the mimic of his fulsome fondnesses and follies, but with more honour and more pride. As the Duke, his uncle, was a political

weathercock, he was a political weather-glass ; his quicksilver being always up at insolence, or down at despair.”

It is extremely doubtful whether Lincoln had any real interest in or feeling for the house. It was just a convenient place to live. He was fonder of sporting pleasures than of exercising himself in the world of politics. Indeed, he had little need to strive politically with such an able sponsor as Henry Pelham.

No. 10 served Pelham well through his proxies. When the Prime Minister's younger daughter was to be married to the Hon. Lewis Monson in 1753 Lincoln moved out of the house and the bridal couple moved in. Thus for the second time in its history No. 10 was in the nature of a wedding gift. What a contrast was now provided by the spectacle of this house, officially selected for the grave deliberations of Prime Ministers, given over to a honeymoon couple. As far as the wide world was concerned, it was an uneventful period for No. 10. Perhaps, however, this interregnum was a welcome change for the house. But next year No. 10 saw another change when, with the replacement of Pelham as First Lord by the Duke of Newcastle, the house was again required as a Chancellery. Thus Henry Bilson-Legge followed the Monsons in occupation. He became Chancellor of the Exchequer on April 6th, 1754.

In the chain of No. 10's occupants Legge forms a link with Walpole. He knew the house well, and indeed had probably already lived in it, when private

secretary to Sir Robert. He had embarked on a political career, for which he was eminently suited, after a short time in the Navy. The old house certainly held tender, if somewhat painful, memories for Legge, who, years before, had fallen in love with Walpole's daughter, Maria. The alcoves and the terrace of No. 10 had heard many a tender passage between the two. Their romance did not develop as they had planned, however, for Walpole was furious when he found that Legge was trying to "steal" his daughter.

Though the King considered that No. 10 now housed a fool—he had agreed to Legge being given the Chancellorship only on condition that he was kept well away from the Royal presence—this was not the opinion of others. Walpole thought highly of him, despite the breach that had occurred between them. He said that Legge had "very little rubbish in his head." The fact was that No. 10 now housed an ambitious man. How fitting Walpole thought it that No. 10 Downing Street should be occupied by Legge may be judged from the fact that he considered his erstwhile secretary more suited for the post even of First Lord than most of his party.

Following its reversion to the bridal chamber, No. 10 became busier than it had ever been before. Its new occupant was an extremely able financier. Moreover, he had the courage of his convictions and did not fear to act boldly at the right moment. Pitt the Elder had launched many bitter attacks on Downing

Street when Walpole was in occupation, but these ceased when Legge arrived. As a member of the Boy Patriot party Pitt had hated the influence of the House of Hanover, and had been ranged with Bolingbroke and the Prince of Wales, who heartily detested Walpole and was on very indifferent terms with the King. Pitt was a frequent visitor to Downing Street. Indeed, at this time there was no more rabid stronghold of Whiggery than No. 10.

Legge, spoken of by Pitt as the favourite child of the Whigs, admitted that the party had raised him to the position he had attained, and swore that when he fell he would pride himself on nothing but on being a Whig. This fall was precipitated on November 13th, 1755, by a speech in which Legge spoke those words of wisdom—“ we ought to have done buying up every man’s quarrel on the continent.” This remark referred to threatened hostilities with France. Within a week he was out of office and preparing to quit No. 10.

The house was now left empty, and for a period of nearly twelve months the rooms that had been filled with so much activity were silent. Not for long, though, was the house deprived of a tenant, for Legge returned there on resuming office. On November 15th, 1756, once more he was Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Though it may be agreed that Legge was an exceptionally competent financier at a time when very few men of this calibre were to be found, it must

be admitted that he was a man who knew how to look after himself and who in that process was not over scrupulous.

In the story of No. 10 it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly when a tenant left the house. The evidence is sometimes conflicting and sometimes entirely non-existent.

In April, 1757, it is probable, though not certain, that No. 10 was again vacant, this time for a short period only. Legge left office in April, but resumed the Chancellorship on July 2nd, in a strong Ministry formed under Newcastle and Pitt. There had been some doubt whether No. 10 would be occupied by Legge again on this third occasion as it was suggested that he should be given the post of First Lord of the Admiralty and made a peer. But to this the King absolutely refused to agree. Indeed, the King had never less liked any occupant of No. 10, and nothing would induce him to change his views.

When in 1761 the house was finally vacated by Legge, who had flatly refused to introduce a motion in the Commons for the payment of a large sum of money to the Landgrave of Hesse, the Chancellor delivered his Seal of Office to the King, solemnly declaring :

“ My future life shall testify to my zeal.”

“ I am indeed glad to hear it,” replied the King, “ for nothing but your future life could eradicate the ill impression that I have received of you.”

Though admitting his capabilities, Horace Walpole

says of Legge that “ avarice or flattery, application or ingratitude, nothing came amiss that might raise him on the ruins of either friends or enemies ; indeed, neither were so to him except by the proportion of their power.”

Those who lived in No. 10 Downing Street have seldom been free from the attacks of their enemies, and Legge was no exception. During Legge’s temporary retirement Charles James Fox had tried to win his allegiance from Pitt. Fox had written, confidentially, suggesting that they would team very well together. This letter Legge entirely disregarded, much to the exasperation of Fox, who wrote to ask for it back. It was returned to him immediately, without comment. Thus he earned the enmity of Fox’s supporters, and it was one of these, Harris by name, who tried to catch him off his guard with a reference to the double salary he received, as Chancellor and Treasury Lord. Legge was quite unperturbed and replied at once that if others were willing to serve for nothing he would gladly do so as well.

Many of those who have lived in No. 10 have used their position to their personal advantage. There have been many excellent opportunities for the abuse of power, by the acquisition of sinecures, by parliamentary tactics designed to affect the price of stocks for the purposes of speculation, or by other more devious and subtle stratagems. The reputation of other days is in striking contrast to the character enjoyed by the No. 10 of to-day.



It would be hard indeed to imagine No. 10 Downing Street as a clearing house for sweepstake tickets, yet this is the role that it assumed at one time during Legge's tenancy. He had made a proposition for a Guinea Lottery an outstanding feature of the budget. Being an extremely able financier it is doubtful if he had the slightest confidence in its success, yet he made a great parade of purchasing one thousand tickets for himself. These tickets did not long remain in No. 10 for Legge got rid of them in the shortest possible time, at no loss to himself.

Apart from politics, Downing Street has sheltered many different trades and callings, pandering sometimes to ill and vanities of many kinds. Politicians find at election time that they have to be as careful of their throats as a *prima donna*. The most carefully prepared, the most brilliant of speeches, can be spoiled by a muffled or rasping voice.

Louis Barbay knew this, and in this illustrious neighbourhood he did a great trade during the middle eighteenth century, every debate in the House probably bringing in more customers.

"Louis Barbay" (said his placards) "successor to the late Mrs. *Maria Wickstead*, Being the only Person that has possession of her Secret for Curing *Sore Throats* and *Wens*, though of ever so large a Size, by her infallible *Lozenges* and *Powders*, gives this Notice, that they will be sent to any Part, with *Directions* how to take them.

Letters directed to me, at Mr. Huckabys, the

Rose & Crown, the Corner of Downing Street, Westminster, (Post paid) shall be punctually answered.”

Perhaps No. 10 would periodically send round to Mr. Huckaby at the tavern for a few lozenges. Some people seem to have bought them in bulk, particularly tavern-keepers. The beer-houses and wine-rooms of the day were the centre of political argument and discussion, and thus the demand was created for Mrs. Wickstead’s secret preparations. But the goods were cheap, as is shown by a note that reads: “Delivered to Mr Tippin att the Chesher Cheese.—500 Pills—Paid for them 0-3<sup>s</sup>-0.”

It is thought that for a time, after Legge’s departure, the house was occupied by Thomas Pelham, but here again evidence is far from conclusive. In 1762, however, there came to No. 10 a man who offered a most striking contrast to the Chancellor the King had so greatly detested. If under Legge No. 10 had rung with talk of high finance, during the occupation of Sir Francis Dashwood it assumed something of the atmosphere of a bawdy-house. In every respect Dashwood and his predecessor in office—once more we find a Chancellor in occupation of the house—were dissimilar in the extreme. Latterly the house had contained an efficient business man, now it was occupied by one “to whom a sum of five figures was an impenetrable secret.”

Legge had been entirely unremarkable in appearance, quiet and unpretentious of manner. Dashwood

was full of unbridled high spirits, bawdy and uncouth. Legge was a cheerful and reasonably good-humoured person, with a somewhat caustic wit, but he could not rival Dashwood's brilliance, and certainly had not his ingenuity of wit or his flair for large-scale practical joking. One of Dashwood's japes is well worth the telling, in that it gives a clear idea of the temperament of No. 10's new occupant.

Dashwood travelled much in his youth, mainly in Italy, and while on a visit there he became acquainted with a Good Friday custom which was connected with the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican at Rome. The congregation would buy, as they entered the Chapel, little scourges and then assemble in the dim light of three candles. One candle would be snuffed and the congregation would remove their outer garments. The extinction of the second candle was the signal for more undressing. When the last candle went out all present set about scourging themselves in penance for their sins, giving vent meanwhile to such cries and groans as individual taste or their several abilities at self-castigation made suitable.

One of these performances the future tenant of No. 10 Downing Street attended. He was clothed in a long coat similar to that worn by watchmen. After buying his little scourge he went off to the furthest and dimmest end of the chapel, where the light of the sputtering candles hardly reached. The first candle went out. Then the second. Meanwhile Dashwood took off his coat and made ready. With



MR. SPENCER PERCEVAL



the snuffing of the third candle he produced a good, strong English horsewhip and lashed out right and left as he ran down the aisle towards the door. The shrieks and groans were far louder and far more realistic than at any previous ceremony. Someone cried out that the devil was in their midst, and all took up the cry in a frenzied rush for the door. During the confusion Dashwood escaped unnoticed. Unfortunately, the identity of the Devil's deputy leaked out and Sir Francis had to leave Italy without delay.

Unsuited for the house and the position that he occupied, Dashwood had the virtue of not entertaining inflated notions of his capabilities. After committing in 1763 the worst Budget speech that Parliament has had to listen to, he exclaimed in self-derision: “ People will point at me and cry—‘ There goes the worst Chancellor of the Exchequer that ever appeared.’ What agonies of spirit the house in Downing Street witnessed while Dashwood feverishly struggled to compose this speech on a subject so foreign to his knowledge and interests ! Even the atmosphere of No. 10 failed to inspire more than an awkward, clumsy welter of obscure words.

Despite its wide variety of experience No. 10 has never before nor since been the scene of such strange happenings as were witnessed during the occupation of Sir Francis Dashwood, who was one of the leading members of the recently formed Dilettante Society. At that time the best qualification for membership of

the Dilettanti was to be a confirmed drunkard and libertine. All members were supposed to have visited Italy, for nominally the Society had for its purpose the encouragement of the Arts, but if the candidate enjoyed a sufficiently enviable reputation for debauchery few questions were asked. Under such conditions it would have been surprising had the house led a sober life at this period.

Since those days No. 10 has become as respectable as a dead cousin, and so has the Dilettante Society. In those days Art and Alcohol were indispensable to each other in high society, and Society then had among its members a number of the most noted profligates of the times. Such facts may seem a trifle out of place in the sober biography of a house—and, moreover, the most historic house in Great Britain—but it may be of interest to remark some of the better-known members of the Society that Dashwood graced.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Lord Dundas, Charles James Fox, David Garrick, Towneley, and the Duke of Dorset were all early members of the Dilettanti, and not infrequent visitors to Downing Street; and in No. 10 must have been discussed much of the club's affairs, far more important, to Dashwood's mind, than matters of State. Notable also, as members of the Club, were the brothers Henry and Robert Vansittart.

Nicholas Vansittart, son of Henry, was to occupy No. 10 fifty years later, but he was an inoffensive

man, very different in character from his father and uncle. While Governor of Bengal Henry Vansittart sent home to his brother a live baboon, which Robert promptly presented to the Hell Fire Club, which included all the notorious members of the Society. The unfortunate animal was received with much joy and hilarity and used regularly to be given the eucharist by Dashwood at the Club's meetings. But life at No. 10 was not all debauchery and merry-making. The wife of this bacchic satanist shed many a tear in the privacy of her chamber. Sarah Dashwood, previously widow of Sir Richard Ellis, has been described as a “ poor, forlorn Presbyterian prude,” and anyone less suited as a wife for Dashwood it would be hard to imagine.

The most involved finance that normally took place in No. 10 at this time was concerned with the allocation of the fines of the Dilettante Society. Various indeed were the ways in which these fines were incurred. Lord Sandwich was fined £21 when he was appointed Ambassador to the Congress at Aix-la-Chapelle, but it seems that when he became Recorder of Huntingdon his fine only amounted to 2½d. Fox paid £9 9s. 6d. into club funds when he was appointed a Lord of the Admiralty. It is possible that while Dashwood was in occupation most of the Club books were kept at No. 10, though the Society met regularly at the Thatched House Tavern in St. James's Street, where remarkable pictures of some of the members were housed long after the Club had assumed a very



different character. In one of these No. 10's occupant was depicted in the clothing of a monk, kneeling before a statue of the Venus de Medici. The look in his eyes is not entirely religious, and instead of a rosary his hands hold a full cup of wine.

Many of No. 10's tenants have been lovers of good living, but at no other time in its existence has it housed so thorough-going a debauchee. As the devotees in the Sistine Chapel once thought that the Devil was in their midst, so must many in England have thought that in No. 10 was Satan's apostle, for Dashwood and his followers practised many rites which are associated with the Black Mass. Whether or not these were ever performed in Downing Street is uncertain, for the Society was well accommodated at Medmenham Abbey, a renovated ruin which Dashwood acquired.

The "Franciscans of Medmenham" used to wear monastic clothes, had their special monkish names, slept in cells and ate together in a proper refectory. Their mark is left in several places in the country, one of the most notable of which is the golden globe on the tower of St. Lawrence Church at West Wycombe, which holds twelve people. The "Hell-Fire Club," as the "Franciscans" were called, used to hold séance there when the Devil was said to be loose in storm and hurricane.

While Dashwood was in No. 10 George Grenville had been Secretary of State, and when Bute resigned the Premiership, on April 8th, 1763, Grenville took

over the offices of both First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. The recent Chancellor had the Barony of Le Despencer revived in his favour and left Downing Street.

Though Dashwood's capabilities were so negligible as to bathe No. 10 in ridicule he was not wholly contemptible. His tax of 4s. per hogshead on cider and perry made him unpopular with the growers, and his Budget speech was received “ with shouts of laughter,” yet when Chatham, while making the last speech of his career in the House of Lords, fell down in a dead faint Dashwood, then Baron le Despencer, was the only peer who went to his aid. Wilkes had said that he owed his high position as Chancellor of the Exchequer to his ability in adding up tavern bills. But it is certain that by recognising his own limitations he caused less harm than some politicians whose futility has only been exceeded by their self-confidence.

## CHAPTER V

### No. 10 LOSES AMERICA

Mutual structural decay of tenant and house—Stamp Act starts ball rolling—Virtue in No. 10—Fame or £4300 p.a. ?—The Great Repair—The “Champagne Speech”—No. 10 raids Stock Exchange—American trouble increases—It becomes critical—Belated back-out—No. 10, prison—Siege of Downing Street—“O God, it is all over !”

THE story of No. 10 Downing Street between the years 1764 and 1784 is one of change and turmoil. The house itself was in so bad a state of repair that parts of it were on the verge of collapse, and the events which were discussed within its walls were of so chaotic a nature that British politics and the Empire itself might have been supposed to be following suit. Only after great expense was the building satisfactorily reconstructed ; only after the War of Independence with its attendant loss and humiliation did its daily life return to normal.

George Grenville, the next occupant of No. 10, became Prime Minister as a result of George III's determination to end the war with France which had broken out in 1756. By the Peace of Paris signed in 1763 we acquired Canada and several of the West Indian Islands, but disgracefully deserted our old and good ally, Frederick of Prussia. Despite our great territorial gains, the outcry against this betrayal was

tremendous, and Lord Bute was compelled to resign.

The King chose Grenville because he thought him a man who would be content to allow No. 10 to become a mere puppet theatre, with himself in the role of principal puppet. Certainly the Marquis of Bute shared this belief, regarding Grenville merely as a complaisant tool he could use to his own ends. But both men had misjudged Grenville's mettle. No. 10 now became the home of a man to whom the exercise of power was a ruling passion.

Grenville had sworn, on taking office, that he did so to secure the Crown from Whig influence, but it soon became evident that his first concern was to secure it from any other influence than his own. That this influence did little to guide the King well in the Colonial problems he was shortly to face may be judged from Walpole's description of the new Premier: "Scarce any man ever wore in his face such outward and visible marks of the hollow, cruel and rotten heart within." That the same author also says of him that "beneath useful, unpromising outside lay lurking great abilities" perhaps makes the case rather worse.

When Bute found that he could not make use of Grenville as he had hoped he tried at once to oust him. Successively he put forward Lord Hardwicke and Pitt as candidates to form a ministry in his place. Both attempts failed, and the King had to beg Grenville to stay, and even agree to the condition that

Bute should no longer be allowed to have his voice in counselling the Throne.

Shortly after Grenville had taken up residence No. 10 rang to the discussions concerning the new Ministry's first serious problem. It was certainly damaging to Grenville's leaping ambition that he should have been forced into conflict with so fiery a personality as John Wilkes. Wilkes was a Member of Parliament, clever and entirely unprincipled. It is more than probable that he had been a frequent visitor to No. 10 while Dashwood was there, for he was one of the earliest members of the "Franciscans."

Indeed, Dashwood supported him in Parliament after his arrest following the explosion caused by the issue on April 23rd, 1762, of the famous No. 45 of the *North Briton*, a newspaper which he conducted. In so many words the paper said that the King's speech contained lies in reference to Britain's recent ally, the King of Prussia. The article was unprecedented. Whatever its truth, it made us the laughing stock of Europe in its bald avowal of the Crown's hypocritical attempt to claim credit for assisting the King of Prussia when in truth he had been deserted at a moment of crisis.

King George took the attack as a personal affront and placed Grenville in the extremely unenviable position of insisting that Wilkes should be prosecuted immediately. The Prime Minister retired to Downing Street to consider the position. Should he please the King by taking strong measures against Wilkes

and risk public unpopularity? Eventually he made the blundering decision that Wilkes should be arrested forthwith, ignoring the fact that all Members of Parliament were privileged persons.

Further, the arrest was made by means of a general warrant in which no name was mentioned. The victim had a brilliant and caustic wit, and it is said that when on his way to incarceration in the Tower he asked that if they could find such a spot there, they would oblige him by not imprisoning him in any room which had ever been occupied by a Scotsman.

The situation was not eased when Chief Justice Pratt ordered the prisoner to be released on the ground that his arrest had been illegal. Grenville then seems to have lost his head entirely, for he allowed the House of Commons to take up the case and expel Wilkes, a course which merely had the effect of turning the offending man into a popular idol.

The old house in Downing Street now became the scene of meetings and decisions which led directly to one of the most dramatic events in British history—the loss of the American colonies. In judging Grenville's actions at this critical period it is kind, and perhaps only just, to bear in mind a fact which was not learned until he died in 1770, namely that, like the house he occupied, he suffered from advanced structural decay. During his residence in No. 10 he may have suffered constant pain, for on his death in delirium it was disclosed that his "ribs were carious

and quite worn away, and his skull as thin as paper." This, then, was the physical condition of the man who now proceeded to handle the anxious problem of American colonies.

Unfortunately, he did not allow his health to prevent personal attention to even the minutest detail of administration. Obstinate and self-seeking as he was, Grenville prided himself upon his conscientious thoroughness. Perhaps had he been less honest in this respect American history would have followed a very different course.

According to an Under-Secretary of the time: "Mr. Grenville lost America because he read the American despatches, which none of his predecessors ever did." If walls have ears, assuredly they have mouths, and no doubt the walls of No. 10 heaved as many a sigh as they then showed cracks, for Grenville was a "tedious and tactless man." These walls must have listened to many a dissertation from his lips, for conversation with Grenville was usually a one-sided affair. Indeed, it is said to have been something of an achievement for anyone else to contribute half a dozen words to the discussion.

Through the centuries many a statesman has mouthed the words of his speeches by the fireplaces and cornices of No. 10, but seldom can the ritual have been more trying than with this occupant, particularly in the hours before the 1764 Budget speech which has been described as a miracle of repetitive boredom.

The result of all this labour and many high-sounding

words was disappointing, and, eventually, disastrous. Grenville introduced the Stamp Act in 1765. If much midnight oil was consumed in No. 10 in the preparation of this piece of legislation very little time was passed in considering the outlook of the colonists. But then Grenville had not the breadth of mind necessary in understanding the point of view of people living outside his own narrow orbit.

It was perfectly true, as the Prime Minister maintained, that the recent French wars had been waged largely for the benefit of the colonists and that therefore they should contribute to the cost. But no effort was made to ascertain how they would prefer to meet the debt. Pitt and Edmund Burke loudly denounced Grenville's policy. Ferment reigned in No. 10 and the Act became law. Then, unexpectedly, the King quarrelled with Grenville on another matter, and the man who was prepared to go to all lengths in retaining favour found himself thrust from the street of his ambitions.

King George's next choice for Prime Minister was the Marquis of Rockingham, who appointed one William Dowdeswell as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Dowdeswell appears to have moved into No. 10 as a matter of course. Indeed, by this period precedent seems to have established the house as the residence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer—though it was still officially at the disposal of the First Lord of the Treasury.

Indeed, between 1735 and 1834 no fewer than nine-



teen of its occupants were Chancellors of the Exchequer, eight of whom also held the office of First Lord of the Treasury. Only six men who were First Lords without being at the same time Chancellors, are found in occupation during the period. Thus it seems that at one time a First Lord merely occupied the house if he were also Chancellor—an anomalous situation considering the terms of the grant. Yet even in Walpole's time a Royal Letter mentions "the house now inhabited by the Right Honourable the Chancellor of His Majesty's Exchequer," when it could as correctly have referred to Walpole by his other office, that of First Lord of His Majesty's Treasury.

Certainly Rockingham missed no personal comforts in not himself occupying No. 10, for at this time the house was not a comfortable abode. On the side next the street, the oldest part, the walls had cracked and were almost falling away—many of the floors and ceilings had sagged and nearly all were uneven—the chimneys smoked atrociously, and the hearths were sinking through the floors.

It is characteristic of Dowdeswell that he did not complain. Perhaps his readiness to suffer minor discomforts gladly explains in part his considerable popularity. He was a man of vigorous courage, "perfectly free from any of that rapacious unevenness of temper which embitters friendship and perplexes business," to use the words of a letter written by Burke, who continues: "he was the best to act with

in public and live with in private, from the manly decision and firmness of his judgment and the extreme mildness of his temper."

Indeed, Dowdeswell—"a senator twenty years, a minister for one, a virtuous citizen for his whole life"—had no stauncher friend or uncompromising admirer than Burke, the author of this tribute also. Though the remark was contained in Dowdeswell's epitaph, and epitaphs usually refer to the better side of a man's character, Burke vowed his panegyric to be so perfectly true that every word might be deposed on oath.

During the period that this new tenant was in occupation No. 10 was gay with the laughter of children, and for the time the house could hardly have sheltered more happiness or more good qualities within its ramshackle shell. It seems indeed hard to believe that in those times, almost devoid of political honour or disinterestedness, No. 10 should house so much good when all its enemies had not such a weight of virtue among the lot of them.

Perhaps it would be difficult to believe in Dowdeswell were there not at least one dissentient voice. But this is afforded by Horace Walpole. Possibly Horace still resented the intrusion of strange people into the house that he had loved so well, and thus added a touch of unnecessary venom to his comments on its occupants. Be this as it may, Dowdeswell is found dull. He was, says Walpole, "so suited to the drudgery of the office (of Chancellor), as far as it depends

on arithmetic, that he was fit for nothing else. Heavy, slow, methodical without clearness, a butt for ridicule, unversed in every graceful art and a stranger to men and courts, he was only esteemed by the few to whom he was personally known." No. 10 has housed many since to whom the words might seem equally applicable, but not all have had Dowdeswell's transparent honesty or his knowledge of the intricacies of this country's finances. In his early days he had inclined to Tory principles, but it was as a Whig that he became a leader in the House, and from that allegiance, once taken, he did not swerve

No. 10 again took a hand in the vexed problem of the American colonies and this time with better judgment. With Dowdeswell as Chancellor the stamp duties were repealed. But it was for a short time only that the house enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere of honesty and hearty good-fellowship that its new tenant carried wherever he went. Not the least remarkable thing about this man was his refusal, on the fall of the Rockingham administration in 1766, to accept a lucrative sinecure on which to retire.

He was not rich, and had not inflated his purse at the expense of the country, at that time quite an ordinary procedure for a Chancellor. His family expenses were heavy. Consequently, it is not surprising that both his opponents and his supporters were astonished when he declined to accept any post which would interfere with his engagements to the Whig party. Indeed his refusal, both of the Presi-

dency of the Board of Trade and a Joint-Paymastership was a seven days' wonder.

During the short time that intervened between Dowdeswell's retirement and his departure from his official residence No. 10 was bombarded with letters of thanks and presentations from merchants living in the bigger towns all over the country. His sound common sense and his competence in administration had brought about the improvement and encouragement of trade, and those who benefited were properly grateful.

In all that can be said of Dowdeswell, whether in eulogy of his honesty or deprecation of his alleged dullness, exact opposites can be aptly applied to his successor in office and in No. 10 Downing Street—Charles Townshend. Probably the curtest invitation to dwell a space in No. 10 was that extended to Townshend by Pitt, when the latter was in process of forming his Cabinet in July, 1766. It was a masterpiece of brevity :

“ Sir,

You are of too great magnitude not to be in a responsible place : I intend to propose you to the King to-morrow for Chancellor of the Exchequer, and must desire to have your answer to-night by 9 o'clock.”

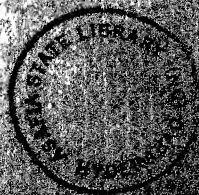
Curt, to the point, take it or leave it. Pitt knew his man, knew his vanity and his greed. As Paymaster-General, the post he then held, Townshend's salary

was £7000 per annum ; as Chancellor it would be only £2700—but the position was far more important. It was a peremptory letter, designed to leave no time for changes of mind or financial arrangements.

No. 10 or not? That was the question that put Townshend on the rack. No. 10 meant less money, but greater power and fame. Were the advantages worth a sacrifice of £4300 a year? Townshend behaved with characteristic vacillation. He sat at home all day in a state of great agitation, discussing the letter with all comers in a positive frenzy of indecision.

Anxious for anybody's and everybody's opinion in the hope that he might glean some scrap of wisdom which would save him from drowning among the reeds of hesitation which swayed first one way and then the other. First he asked Pitt to retain him as Paymaster—then changed his mind and begged to be allowed to take up the Chancellorship. He was appointed on August 2nd, 1766.

Without delay Townshend moved into No. 10 and immediately decided that under no circumstances would he put up with such a dilapidated and tumble-down house. Though the traditions of No. 10 might be satisfying to his vanity, he doubtless felt its condition unfitting and unflattering to the position and person of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. This attitude was characteristic of Townshend. So before the Treasury Lords no later than August 12th is the following document :



MR. W. E. GLADSTONE



“ . . . by desire of the Rt Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We have caused the House in Downing Street belonging to the Treasury to be surveyed, & find the Walls of the old part of the said House next the street to be much decayed, the Floors & Chimneys much sunk from the levell & no party Wall between the House adjoining on the Westside.

We are of Opinion that to repair the present Walls, Chimneys & Floors next the street will not be for His Majesty's service : We have therefore made a plan & Estimate for taking down the Front next the street & also the East Flank Wall of the Hall, to build a party Wall on the Westside to prevent the danger of Fire to repair the remaining part of the Old Building & to Erect an additional Building adjoining thereto. All which Works besides employing such of the Old Materials that are sound & good will Amount to the sum of Nine hundred & Fifty pounds.”

The repairs that were then put in hand came to be known as “The Great Repair” and took eight years to complete. Yet at the end of them there seems to have been very little to show. Indeed, perhaps the principal thing discovered was that the whole structure needed rebuilding.

The historic house in Downing Street has had some remarkable occupants, few more so than Townshend. His tall and well-built figure lent a



dignity to his appearance which it might otherwise have lacked ; when he spoke his resonant voice and forceful manner held the attention of all listeners. Further light is turned upon the character of No. 10's new occupant by the story of the most astonishing speech that has so far been made in Parliament.

Townshend's " champagne speech " was so called because an excess of this heady drink during a meal in No. 10 was popularly supposed to have been its main inspiration. Brilliant it certainly was, yet surely the most irrelevant speech that has ever been delivered.

On the morning of the day the " champagne speech " was delivered No. 10 had seen Townshend off to the House in the normal manner. He apparently made an excellent and logical speech on the matter of some East India Company Dividends then up for discussion. Following that a member, Mr. Dyson, was to move for leave to bring in a Bill to regulate these dividends.

The quiet and peace of No. 10 was preferable to having to listen to Mr. Dyson, Townshend appears to have thought, for he stayed no longer at the House but hastened home to No. 10 and dinner. At the hospitable board in the dining-room of No. 10 Townshend and intimate friends of his, Sir George Colebrooke and Sir George Yonge, sat down to a well-chosen and well-cooked lunch. Meanwhile, in the House, Mr. Dyson's motion was causing consternation and alarm—for it was a new and unusual thing in itself and as such alone caused considerable agitation.

Probably the meal in No. 10 was no more than half-way through—perhaps hardly started—when a messenger arrived hotfoot from the House, desiring the Chancellor of His Majesty's Exchequer's immediate presence. One can imagine Townshend's irritation: "Good Lord, Colebrooke, what an impertinence to disturb a man at table. The duck is excellent, and would indeed be spoiled and wasted. I will not go, they must wait. Why should I so soon desert this peaceful, quiet house for the babble and folly that I have but so recently left?"

Messenger after messenger was turned away from No. 10, and still the Chancellor tarried. At last he left the house and returned to the Commons. As soon as he arrived he proceeded to speak, and, to the astonishment of some dozen people with whom he himself had drawn up the motion that very morning in No. 10, started off by saying that he had not been consulted on it. An amazing speech followed, which by no one could be better pictured than in the words of Walpole. . . .

"To the purpose of the question he said not a syllable. It was a descant on the times, a picture of the parties, of their leaders, of their hopes and defects. . . . The Bacchanalian enthusiasm of Pindar flowed in torrents less rapid & less eloquent, and inspires less delight, than Townshend's imagery, which conveyed meaning in every sentence. It was Garrick writing and acting extempore scenes of Congreve."

That the inspiration of No. 10 in the making of

this remarkable speech should have been discounted in favour of the inspiration of champagne is not quite fair either to No. 10 or to Townshend. Colebrooke, who had dined with him at No. 10 and been in his company practically from the time he left Parliament until he finally consented to return, said that Townshend, Sir George Yonge and himself accounted for only one bottle of champagne after the meal. Though Townshend was a lover of the delights of the table, he suffered from a weak digestion, and another man's daily portion was for him excess.

Colebrooke comes out in favour of the inspiration of No. 10 rather than of wine, for he says that the speech which caused such a sensation, producing an extraordinary feeling of exhilaration in all who heard it, had previously been carefully deliberated upon by Townshend in the privacy of No. 10, and he merely seized the opportunity of delivering it.

An incident prior to the speech, in which No. 10 played a direct part, may be some explanation of the appearance of insobriety which some said Townshend gave. During delivery of the speech and in a moment of excitement Townshend rubbed from his eye a patch of black ribbon, which, says Colebrooke, had been necessitated by a fall from bed during an epileptic fit. Those who have had temporarily to cover up one eye know how difficult it becomes to judge distances and to walk about without stumbling.

This may have been the cause of any evidence of unsteadiness shown by the Chancellor. Townshend

was indeed *en veine* that night, for direct from the House he went to supper at Conways and "kept the table in a roar till 2 a.m. with mimicry and wit."

In short, No. 10 was the stage for the most brilliant but erratic artiste of the time. The house provided the setting for a man who might, as an actor, even have rivalled Garrick, for he was a far better mimic than the famous actor. During Townshend's occupation No. 10 lived in an atmosphere of ribaldry and laughter, at a constant pitch of expectancy. Few men who have lived there have equalled Townshend in repartee or in the making of lucid and impromptu speeches. His vanity was colossal, but it dwelt under a constant shadow. He feared he might not be quite as great as his friends assured him that he was.

During Townshend's period of office Downing Street became a seething hot-bed of financial speculation. Had to-day's scientific marvels been available then, the most important article of furniture in the house would have been a ticker-tape machine. The Cabinet was composed of a motley crew having very diverse political opinions. Pitt lost influence and popularity by retiring to the Upper House as Lord Chatham, and Townshend immediately began to assert himself.

The Premier was at that period preparing to deprive the East India Company of the right they claimed to territorial revenue, while in direct contravention of this policy Townshend proceeded to uphold

their claims. Speculators hung expectant on Townshend's every word, for on his possible changes of front depended the rise or fall of the most important stocks on the market. Over the affairs of the East India Company Townshend showed much inconsistency, but his changes of mind did not in this case emanate from an unstable temperament.

For a time No. 10 Downing Street virtually controlled the East India stocks, and there is no doubt that the Chancellor of the Exchequer profited considerably from the position in which he found himself. Certainly Townshend was a heavy speculator. Naturally his parliamentary policy in the matter of the East India Company affected the price of the stock. What simpler, should he wish to sell, than to favour the fortunes of the Company in the House, or, should he desire a fall in values, than to consider measures unfavourable to its interests? As regards political honour, in Townshend it was negligible. On another occasion, when a public loan was being floated, he much abused his position by reserving a large portion for himself.

During the days immediately preceding January 16th, 1767, there was composed in No. 10 Downing Street a speech which led directly to the loss of America. When Townshend introduced his Budget he proposed that the Land Tax should remain at the figure of 4s. in the pound. He found Dowdeswell and Grenville leagued against him. The latter knew perfectly well that the figure of 4s. in the pound was

necessary for the Government to have any reasonable chance of producing a balanced Budget, yet he deliberately proposed and carried a motion, by a majority of 204 votes to 188, that the tax be reduced to 3s. in the pound. This was the more remarkable as it was the first instance, since the Revolution, of the Government being defeated on a money Bill.

Normally, this would have meant the end of Townshend's tenancy of No. 10, but, clinging eagerly to office, he did not resign. He vowed he would recover the deficiency, some £500,000, by the imposition of taxes upon the American colonies. The burden of his plans, carefully matured in the quiet of his study in Downing Street, he disclosed a while later. The colonists were to be compelled to find supplies, mainly of beef and vinegar, for our soldiery stationed in America. If they proved tiresome, then the Governor of New York was to be instructed to withhold the Royal permission for the holding of Assemblies. This meant nothing more or less than the withdrawal of all the colonists' dearly prized rights of self-government.

Customs commissioners were to enforce the trading laws—which the colonists had hitherto quite happily and successfully evaded—and duties on tea, paper, glass, painters' colours and red and white lead were to be imposed. Poor No. 10, to be made responsible for the loss of the great American colonies, with the brilliant future which they then had! Yet so it was.

All the steps which led up to the War of Independence were conceived and evolved within its friendly walls. In the persons of four successive tenants No. 10 was both the instigator and the authority for the actions from which the war sprang.

“ Authority never measures liberty downwards,” says Horace Walpole, writing of the period. “ Rarely is liberty supposed to mean the independence of those below us ; it means our freedom from the yoke of superiors.”

The pity of the whole procedure was that in all probability Townshend proposed the measures for the taxation of the American colonies as much to regain lost favour at Court as for any other reason. It was evident at the time that they would do little to meet the deficiency caused by the reduction of the Land Tax as their yield at most would be a mere £35,000 to £40,000. Of the liberty of the colonists and the results that might be expected from attempts to curtail it, Townshend thought little and probably cared less.

Ironically enough, in July, 1767, Townshend was made a Freeman of the City of London in recognition of his services in connection with the East India discussions. The house which had been his home during the most triumphant period of his career also saw its end, for on September 4th he died in No. 10. Had he not been so untrustworthy and unstable, had he had more modesty and more principles, Townshend would have been a great man, perhaps the greatest of

his time. However, the near-great man provided No. 10 with a very colourful phase in its history.

Reading of No. 10 Downing Street in the literature of two centuries, and of its several occupants in the criticisms of their own times, one is struck by the vigour and the contradictory nature of the many opinions that have been expressed upon one or other of these themes. No. 10 and its tenants have never been spared the most scathing criticism. The house has been an easy butt on account of its notoriously unsatisfactory foundations. The occupants have usually been regarded as equally if not more decrepit.

When Lord North moved in, shortly after his appointment to the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, on October 7th, 1767, repairs to the house were still in progress. As usual, people said that the building was about to collapse. As usual, they took liberties with the character and personal appearance of the new tenant. It would seem, indeed, that No. 10 Downing Street now housed a veritable ogre. It is as well to remember that in those days merit in personal description lay rather in colour than in accuracy.

To Frederick, Lord North, Second Earl of Guildford, report was more than unflattering. His wide mouth, puffy face, thick lips and bulging eyes were said to make him look like a "blind trumpeter," and the previous occupant of No. 10, by whose tongue he had received many slights, had described him as "a great heavy, booby-looking seeming changeling." Walpole, always difficult to please, says that: "a



deep untuneable voice, which, instead of modulating, he enforced with unnecessary pomp, a total neglect of his person, and ignorance of every civil attention, disgusted all who judged by appearance."

Such words lead one to expect in No. 10's new occupant a man who would with regularity spit upon its doorsteps and hearths. Things were not, however, quite as bad as that. North's stay in the house was remarkable for its length—and for some of the most dramatic moments in the course of the American War. The man himself bore a marked resemblance to the Royal Family. He was of average height (to give a colourless but accurate description of his person may bring him more in focus), heavily built, of fresh complexion and bushy eyebrows. He suffered from two outstanding disabilities on which the wits of the time made play—he was extremely short-sighted, and his speech was impeded by the fact that his tongue was too large for his mouth.

Like No. 10 Downing Street, North could not honestly be described either as handsome or convenient, but equally with No. 10 he sheltered beneath his homely exterior many admirable qualities. He was good-humoured, straightforward, and immune alike to flattery and disfavour. The voice of popularity made no impression on him. Shortly before he became First Lord he remarked that he had not cast his vote in favour of any of the popular measures of the previous seven years. Even if it can be justly said of him that when in opposition to a minister he

was an extremist, and when in office a moderate, this could be said also with truth of the great majority of modern politicians.

North had upheld the unpopular cider tax introduced by Dashwood, he had supported Grenville's Stamp Act, he had opposed the reduction of the Land Tax, and it was on May 1st, 1769, that he moved to retain Townshend's American duties on tea, though this was carried by a majority of only one.

After just over two years in No. 10 as Chancellor of the Exchequer only, Lord North was appointed First Lord of the Treasury when the Duke of Grafton resigned the Premiership on January 29th, 1770. It is particularly significant that this man, of all those First Lords who have lived in No. 10, would never allow himself to be called Prime Minister, averring that there was no such office in the British Constitution. Indeed, throughout the twelve years of his office he was little more than an agent of the King, sinking his abler judgment again and again in order to meet the wishes of the master whom he always served truly.

It is astonishing to find such complacency in a man who cared little for the opinions of others whether of high or low degree. Certainly it was disastrous to our position in America. With North's arrival in No. 10 our quarrel with the American colonists was renewed, for George blindly insisted that all taxes imposed by the British Parliament should be paid to the last stiver. The King seems to have been

constitutionally unable to consider a dispute from any point of view but his own.

Perhaps North foresaw that incidents were bound to occur, for few people have been as unwilling as he to move into No. 10. On the other hand, his reluctance may have been due to the knowledge that as First Lord he would have in opposition not only Chatham and Rockingham, but also Grenville, whom he undoubtedly feared. Possibly it was his desire for support against these opponents that made him so subservient to the King's wishes. However this may be, he played into the King's hands by antagonising the colonists still further.

For a time the spirit of diplomacy seems to have been entirely foreign to No. 10. In order to relieve Parliament of the troublesome affairs of the East India Company, North appointed two Select Committees to draw up a report. As a result of the decisions of these Committees the East India Company was favoured by an Act which permitted them to export tea to America free of duty save that to be collected on the spot. Large consignments were sent to the American colonies.

Feeling ran high, leading eventually to violent disturbances by way of the famous Boston Tea-Party of December, 1773, when rioters threw 340 chests of tea into Boston Harbour. After this event an absurdly high-handed attitude was adopted in No. 10. At this time the conception of self-government for the colonies was beyond the understanding of the average man,

and, indeed, offended national pride. Thus an Act was introduced by a grievously blundering North which was to take the right of government from Massachusetts and to remove the Custom-house from Boston to New Salem, thus ruining the people of Boston.

It is a powerful comment upon popular opinion in those days that this Bill was considered just by most people. It was passed by a considerable majority. In this piece of legislation the councils of No. 10 only expressed parrot-fashion the opinion of the public, crassly short-sighted as that was.

It is in the role of peacemaker that No. 10 takes its last bow before the war actually broke out. At this sudden change of front as much astonishment was expressed as would have been the case had the house one night cast its foundations adrift and been found next morning on the opposite side of Downing Street.

On February 20th, 1775, North proposed and carried a resolution to the effect that, while the colonies imposed their own taxes with the approval of Parliament and the Crown, they should not have further impositions put on them. This measure amounted to an offer of peace to America. When so much had already been done to encourage strife a *volte-face* at this late hour seemed more like sudden panic than genuine recognition of America's rights. In any case matters had gone too far to be checked by this last-minute resource. April 19th marks the Battle of

Lexington. After that nothing could be done and the war in America took its course.

Meanwhile at home No. 10 had become the centre of seething discontent, and close by came serious trouble which might even have brought its new tenant to an untimely end. There was much contention between Parliament and the City of London over the endeavours of the Commons to suppress publication of their debates, and the 1770-71 session was a stormy one. A dramatic incident which involved the Prime Minister showed how high feeling ran.

On March 27th, shortly after Lord North had left the house in his coach on the way to Parliament, he came into collision with a riotous mob, headed by the Lord Mayor, on their way to demonstrate outside the Houses of Parliament. North was struck on the face with a constable's staff, his coach was smashed to pieces, and though he was rescued before he was seriously injured he was dishevelled and hatless. His hat was torn to ribbons by the mob and scraps sold as relics.

"No. 10 will soon be empty again," was the rumour circulated by North's calumniators, but the Minister showed courage and tenacity by denying all reports of his resignation, saying that he would not quit till His Majesty should dismiss him or the people tear him to pieces.

North was a kindly man, and even in the midst of such turmoils he could think of the needs of the poor. Every Sunday morning a charming little ceremony

used to take place outside the historic front door of No. 10.

In June, 1772, Lord North was created a Knight of the Garter, and this honour, rarely indeed conferred upon a commoner, he took very seriously. He considered it his duty to take some step to translate into fact the chivalrous traditions of the early knights, to stress in public the virtue and duty of charity.

Picture, then, No. 10 Downing Street on a Sunday morning. Before the house are assembled twenty starving, bedraggled wretches. Their eyes are fixed on the door as they gather their rags about them to as humble a semblance of respectability as the tatters and the holes will permit. Nearby stands an official keeping a wary eye upon the company. At last the door opens, and servants bearing trays and platters of food step out into the street. The eyes of the beggars glisten as they move forward, bowing clumsily as the imposing figure of the great man himself fills the doorway. He has come in person to see that all are fed, and that each carries away with him a quarter guinea. Thus does Lord North discharge his knightly duty. Twenty poor people go away filled and with 5s. 3d. in their pockets, and, incidentally, there are twenty people less to spread ill rumours about No. 10 Downing Street and its master.

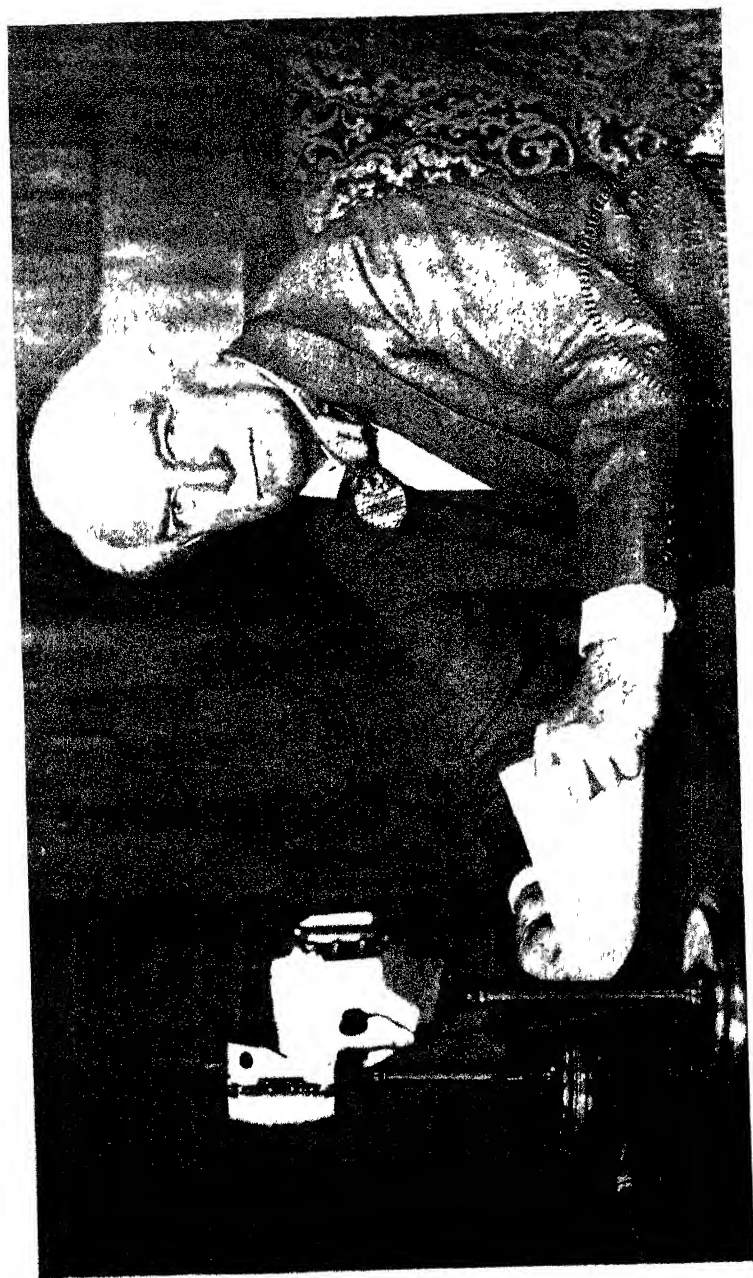
It is said that after a commission designed to come to terms with the American colonists had proved abortive, and after Burgoyne had been defeated at Saratoga, North seldom slept. So little rest did he

find in No. 10 that on several occasions he fell asleep in the House of Commons. His main anxiety now was to quit the house and its responsibilities. Repeatedly he asked the King to be allowed to resign. A prisoner he felt, with No. 10 the prison that chained his reluctant self to cares and miseries. But his entreaties for release met with repeated refusals, and it was entirely against his own conscience that he remained in office. He knew that with a change of Ministry affairs might be mended even at this late hour.

No. 10 now housed a man whose only desire was to be gone. Everything he did seemed to run contrary to his true beliefs, even to the reappointment of Warren Hastings, of whose character and conduct he held no high opinion, to the Governor-Generalship of India. In one quarter only did North feel that he justified his post. From Ireland he earned praise and thanks. Irish manufacturers had been consistently denied free trade because of the greed of English rivals who wished to exclude all competitors from their markets. It was through Lord North that Ireland secured free trade in 1780.

On June 7th of this same year there happened a dramatic incident outside the doors of No. 10. The Gordon Riots had broken out. Around the table in the dining-room were grouped six men, but it is doubtful if they felt a hearty appetite for the food placed before them. Least hungry of all perhaps was John St. John.

Fresh reports of furious rioting nearer and nearer to



MR DAVID LLOYD GEORGE





No. 10 were made known every few minutes. But trouble had been anticipated and No. 10 was not unprepared. Besides Lord North, the host, and St. John, Sir John MacPherson, Mr. Eden (later Lord Auckland), General Simon Fraser and the host's son, Colonel North, were at table together. Suddenly into the little square outside No. 10, then known as Downing Square, surged a howling mob of rioters. A last-minute survey of defences was made.

"Who commands the upper tier?" asked North.

"I do," replied his son, "with twenty and more Grenadiers."

They sat in expectant silence, one leaning forward, another nervously fingering his wine-glass. At any moment through one of No. 10's windows a missile might smash as a signal for the mob to batter in the door. Calmest of all the occupants at that moment was probably the man most threatened by the fury of the rioters—Lord North. Presently the Prime Minister's voice broke the tension. North had been watching St. John, in whose unsteady grip a pistol wavered. Leaning forward on the table, he remarked quietly:

"I'm not half so much afraid of the mob as I am of Jack St. John's pistol." Strategy, however, soon saved No. 10 from danger of attack and storm. Men who were not known to the crowd were sent out to mingle with them. These let it be known that the house was well guarded by soldiery, ready to fire at the first signs of violence. Thus peril was averted, and, with the arrival of fresh troops, the crowd

dispersed. How much in peril No. 10 had been, however, was soon apparent. When danger was past the party mounted to the roof of the house and as night fell they saw London ablaze in no fewer than seven places.

A little more than a year after this event Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. Throughout the course of the American War the despatches had been eagerly awaited in No. 10, and almost all of them had cast gloom and despondency. The story of this last defeat caused North great sorrow, for doubtless he realised the extent of his responsibility. When he first heard the news it is said that he appeared stricken as if he had received a cannon-ball in his own breast, "opening his arms and exclaiming wildly : ' Oh God ! It is all over.' "

Once more No. 10 was in deplorable condition. As long ago as September 30th, 1774, Lord North had desired to have the front of the house finished : " Which was begun by a Warrant from the Treasury dated August 9th, 1766." It seems probable that since Townshend had died there, Lord North, finding himself in the chaos of the American War, had not pushed ahead repairs with much vigour. But now the situation could no longer be ignored.

A memorial of the Board of Works dated June 12th, 1781, represents : " the dangerous state of the old part of the House, inhabited by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That it is their opinion no time shall be lost in taking down the said Building ; and they have

therefore made Plans & Estimates of the expence of rebuilding the same, which will amount to £5500." That this was too conservative an estimate will be soon seen when reviewing the work done and the total cost. The new work was well in hand before North left on March 15th, 1782, following a vote of lack of confidence in the Government. North's long stay in No. 10 was at an end. His resignation narrowly forestalled a resolution for his dismissal.

Unwilling ever to occupy No. 10, unwilling even to be styled Prime Minister, the man who had stayed at his post found few thanks when he quitted at last. On delivering the Seals to the King he met with little courtesy or grace: "Remember, my Lord," said His Majesty, "that it is you who desert me, not I you." With these words ringing in his ears "the man who lost the colonies" left Downing Street for ever.

## CHAPTER VI

### No. 10—THE PRODIGAL

Toads on the menu—Pitt the Younger—Accounts of the Great Repair—  
No. 10 gains steadily in popularity—No. 10's power in danger—  
Costly lavishness—Pistols for two—"William and Pitt"—Death of  
Pitt—Tedium and tactlessness.

**T**HERE is considerable doubt as to who occupied No. 10 Downing Street during the year immediately following the resignation of Lord North. Much jealousy and chopping and changing occurred in the political world that revolved around the house. The Marquis of Rockingham became Prime Minister, but he did not choose to occupy No. 10. Probably, however, Lord John Cavendish, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, stayed for a while in Downing Street. His occupation must have been entirely uneventful, but then Pitt the Younger, who succeeded him as Chancellor when the Ministry came to an end on the death of Rockingham in the summer of 1782, moved in for a short time and the atmosphere of the house changed entirely. Pitt proceeded to give Downing Street a foretaste of that splendour and extravagance which it was to enjoy during his later occupation. Though his first stay was so short as to have little importance in the history

of the building, it was his "official and splendid residence" for a few months.

Between April 1783 and December of the same year No. 10 was occupied by the Duke of Portland, First Lord of the Treasury. This was another short stay. Indeed, the house nearly escaped having this tenant at all, for the King had not been by any means anxious to confirm his appointment as Premier, and would have preferred to have retained the Earl of Shelburne, who had taken over after Rockingham's death.

Downing Street must have found the Duke dull after its brief experience of Pitt. Portland's character has been universally disparaged, though his private life, unlike those of many of his predecessors in No. 10, was a model of respectability. He was a protégé of Fox and had been consistently in opposition to Lord North, but he was a bad speaker and of extremely mediocre abilities. No. 10 was not the right place for the Duke of Portland. He had been far more in his element as Home Secretary. Walpole writes scathingly, portraying him as a man who "till his nomination to Ireland, scarce a hundred men knew to exist. He has lived in ducal dudgeon with half a dozen toad eaters. . . ."

If toads were included in the menus of the meals served in the dignified dining-room of No. 10 during the days of the Duke of Portland the item was in striking contrast to the prodigal good living which returned to the house when Pitt once again entertained

there. George, to his great pleasure, succeeded in getting rid of Fox and Burke, with whom he was constantly at enmity, and placed the Government in the hands of William Pitt, who was then only twenty-four years old.

When the news was told in the House of Commons it was greeted with shouts of laughter. This is not altogether surprising, for, as the prospective occupant of No. 10, Pitt was remarkable for his youth—no tenant as young as he had been received by the house since it had been the bridal home of the boy and girl Earl and Countess of Lichfield. He was certainly fitted for the high honour, but though he had already occupied No. 10 Downing Street as Chancellor, it seemed fantastic that he should return as First Lord of the Treasury. Brilliant son of a brilliant father, who had trained him carefully from an early age, Pitt had matriculated to Cambridge at the age of fourteen and represented Appleby in Parliament before he was twenty-two.

Soon after Pitt had taken up residence in No. 10 the question of repairs to the house again came forward for consideration. Bad foundations in a house are as expensive as bad habits in a man. On March 22nd, 1782, Lord North, Lord Westcote, Lord Palmerston and Sir Richard Sutton had met in the Treasury Chambers, Whitehall, to discuss the new repairs to No. 10 Downing Street, which then had been in progress for nearly a year. It was pointed out to these gentlemen that the funds,

estimated as enough to rescue No. 10 from its sorry plight of disrepair, were insufficient by half. A memorial of the Board of Works was read, stating that “the Repairs, Alterations & Additions at the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s House will amount to the sum of £5,580, exclusive of the sum for which they already have His Majesty’s Warrant : And praying a Warrant for the said sum of £5,580—and also praying an Imprest of that sum to enable them to pay the Workmen.”

Surprisingly enough, this second Estimate does not seem to have been exceeded, as was seen when Mr. Pitt, Mr. Buller, the Marquis of Graham, Mr. Eliot and Mr. Aubrey were assembled in Whitehall Treasury Chambers on January 21st, 1784. A Mr. Wyatt appears to have been the Surveyor in charge of the works, for at the meeting a letter from him, dated January 17th, was read. It runs :

“SIR,

In consequence of your letter I have inspected the Works w<sup>ch</sup> have been executed at the Chancellor of the Exchequers, & very attentively examined the Bills of several Tradesmen respectively, & have not been able to discover any one exceptionable charge.

The Prices allow’d by the Board of Works are very moderate & as far as I can judge the Measurements are fairly taken ; and tho’ the sum Totall may at first View appear enormous for Building Offices & part of a House, yet when



the particular circumstances w<sup>ch</sup> attended these buildings are candidly considered it will appear that from the very great depth and badness of Foundations and the hurry in w<sup>ch</sup> this business was carried on, materials of a much more expensive nature have been used than would otherwise have been necessary, & have therefore very much increas'd & make a material part of these accounts.

The three last charges in this Abstract are Extra allowances to people who superintended at different periods and in different Departments during the Progress of this work, & from the nature of the whole of this Business I am satisfied that they must have given very extraordinary attendance & therefore I am of opinion that it is a Gratuity very properly & fairly given.

I have enclosed an Abstract of the amount of each Artificers Bill, as they (in my opinion) ought to be allowed, and shall be ready to attend you if you wish to ask me any further particulars w<sup>ch</sup> I may not have explained to your satisfaction. I am——

Sir

Yr most humble &  
most obedient Ser<sup>t</sup>

JAMES WYATT."

Mr. Wyatt dates his letter January 15th, though it was mentioned in records as of the 17th. Directions were given in Whitehall that a warrant should be pre-

pared “for the balance due on the said Accompt amounting to £5,539..1..9, the like sum of £5,539;1;9, having been paid in part.”

No. 10 had certainly cost a deal of money to restore to its good standing. It has been suggested that the architect was probably Sir Robert Taylor, but there does not seem to be any room for his fees in the eleven thousand pounds odd recorded as having been paid out. Mr. Wyatt’s “Abstract” makes interesting reading ; under present-day conditions it is possible that prices would be just three times those of 1784 for similar work. Here is the Abstract :

Carpenter,	2136	18	5
Bricklayer,	3086	13	11
Mason,	1531	0	7 $\frac{3}{4}$
Joiner,	1292	8	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Plumber,	632	11	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
Plasterer,	726	19	4
Glazier,	174	2	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
Smith,	430	18	8 $\frac{3}{4}$
Labourer,	781	16	8
Slater,	122	3	8
Adam & Co.,	36	2	10 $\frac{3}{4}$
Painter,	26	7	6 $\frac{3}{4}$
John Woolfe,	50	0	0
Charles Alexander Craig,	30	0	0
Jason Harris,	20	0	0
	<hr/>		
	£11,078	3	6
	<hr/>		

The mathematically minded will notice that the total of this account is  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. out. One wonders, perhaps, with each account minute to a farthing, which one had to lose this sum. Probably Mr. Harris.

As the repairs gradually restored the stability of No. 10 Downing Street architecturally, so Pitt's statesmanship kept its moral front intact against the onslaughts of its enemies. The bitterest of these was probably Charles James Fox, whose dislike of Pitt dated from February 11th, 1783, when the young statesman had been sent to him by Shelburne to negotiate for support of the Ministry. Fox had calmly said that he would not consider support while the Premier (Shelburne) continued in office. "I did not come here to betray Lord Shelburne," Pitt had replied curtly. This incident occurred during Pitt's first Chancellorship.

This early encounter between Pitt and Fox was in the nature of a declaration of war. So from the day when No. 10 received Pitt as First Lord, Fox's political guns were trained on the house with considerable ferocity. From the start No. 10 played a waiting game. Though Fox and his followers used every possible stratagem to harass the new Premier, his remarkable statesmanship, and the restraint with which he refrained from using similar tactics, caused their vindictiveness to recoil upon themselves. In checkmating the efforts of his opponents, Pitt made one particularly shrewd move which greatly strengthened his position in the country.

Early in 1784 the clerkship of the Pells fell vacant. This post is an example of the worst type of sinecure office, being a *dolce far niente* job with a salary of £3000 a year attached. It was taken for granted that this would come straight to No. 10. But to everyone's surprise it was turned away from the door. Pitt presented Colonel Barré with the Clerkship of the Pells, stipulating that Barré should relinquish his pension—which indeed was worth more than £3000—the expense of which the country was accordingly saved.

Since his father's death it is true that Pitt had enjoyed a private income, but this did not amount to more than £300 a year, and to entertain as a Prime Minister in No. 10 costs a good deal more than a Prime Minister's salary. Consequently the extra £3000 a year from the clerkship of the Pells would have been especially valuable to Pitt. These facts were known, and the young First Lord's action in this matter turned the tide in his favour, soon the East India Company and the House of Lords were arrayed on the side of No. 10.

This gesture was characteristic of Pitt, who was of a most independent temperament. Before he had turned to politics he had practised Law and was always prepared to return to the Law rather than serve in a subordinate position in the Government. He had already, in the Rockingham ministry, refused the Vice-Treasurership of Ireland—a position of no

great importance, but carrying a salary of £5000 per annum.

Unable to compete with the Premier in battles of wits, his enemies descended to personal assault. On February 28th Pitt left No. 10 in his coach to be presented with the Freedom of the City. As he was on his way back to the house he passed Brookes Club, a haunt of his political adversaries, and a mob set on him and dragged him out of the coach. Though he returned to No. 10 more shaken than harmed, the incident brought great discredit not only on those who took part in it, but on all No. 10's opponents.

Nevertheless, they continued their unsporting endeavours and, in many venomous attacks, No. 10 was pictured as a place of constant carousal and drunkenness. Certainly to-day we should regard the number of cases of port which were then regularly delivered, and the corresponding number of "empties" that left, as excessive. Were the same thing to happen to-day there would be no little outcry ; but Pitt's libations were not excessive when compared with the amounts of wine that were then commonly consumed.

Those that think of No. 10 Downing Street in the late eighteenth century as "Pitt, port and politics" should know that when Pitt, at the age of fourteen, went up to Cambridge he was taken seriously ill. The medicine prescribed by Dr. Addington was port, and plenty of it. Young Pitt recovered his health, possibly because of, but more probably in spite of

this prescription, but the habit formed during his illness he carried with him to No. 10 Downing Street, and throughout his life.

A frequent visitor to No. 10, and a close personal friend of Pitt's during the later years of his life, Sir William Napier, tells how the Premier consumed his port. Returned to No. 10 to dinner, worn out by a tiring day's business, Pitt would cast himself into a chair and call for a bottle of port. This he would drink entirely in a very short space of time. As, however, he gained strength from the stimulus of the wine, and his exhaustion began to decrease, he would not drink more for the mere sake of drinking.

On one occasion, however, Pitt's fondness for port wine led him into an embarrassing position, causing him to leave No. 10 for an important session in the House under the influence of a more fluid stimulus than the historic traditions of the ancient building. The cellars of No. 10 had been sending up more than the usual quota of bottles to the dining-room, where Pitt was comfortably ensconced disposing of them.

Unexpectedly a messenger arrived, calling for his presence in Parliament. It is reported that when he arrived he was decidedly tipsy. As might be expected, he was far less perturbed about the matter than were his friends, who were greatly upset. One of the Clerks of the House was so distressed that he complained that seeing Mr. Pitt in such a condition had given him a violent headache. This caused the Prime Minister much amusement: "An excellent

arrangement," he remarked. "I have the wine and he has the headache."

After the General Elections of 1784, when Pitt was returned to Parliament as Member for Cambridge, which seat he kept until his death, No. 10 was the turbulent scene of much financial juggling. Seated at his desk overlooking Downing Street, Pitt devised many commonsense if not original methods of making the burden of taxation fall more evenly upon all classes. He was brilliant at adapting recognised schemes to the needs of the moment. It was a direct result of the policy administered by No. 10 that the credit of the country was materially strengthened, though the measures adopted were not always of lasting use.

More than ever, at this time, No. 10 was the centre of interest for the whole country. The schemes devised within its walls were restoring Britain's vanishing trade, and money kept pouring into the Exchequer through the flotation of public loans. No. 10 was no friend of the smugglers who were depriving the honest traders and merchants of their livelihood. Pitt discouraged smuggling by the simple means of lowering the duties on those goods which were most popular with the smugglers.

On May 9th, 1788, Pitt introduced Wilberforce's famous Resolution on the slave trade. Pitt himself had been the instigator of this Resolution. Much of it had been conceived within the historic walls of No. 10 Downing Street, and there, too, had most

of its details been devised. So it was fitting that Pitt should be the one to carry it through while Wilberforce was ill.

In the following year No. 10 faced a determined attempt to overthrow its power—not merely that of its then tenant. The King was suffering from one of his periodical bouts of mental instability, and Fox and his friends endeavoured to establish the Prince of Wales as Regent. Had they won this point No. 10 would have become a cipher, for they demanded unconditional powers for the Prince. This Pitt would not allow. Playing for time, he forced the discussions to such lengths that George had time to recover before any action had been taken.

No. 10's opponents then found that their attempts to capture its authority had strengthened it and weakened themselves. George III could hardly be expected to look with favour upon men who had worked to undermine his personal influence in their own interests at a time when he was incapable of taking action. So Pitt became more powerful, and, amongst many other reforms, devised in the quiet of No. 10 much solid improvement was effected in the country's finances.

Could war have been prevented probably complete success would have attended all the schemes for prosperity directed from the house. But war with France spelt disaster to their fruition. This was declared in 1793, when it became evident that the aims of Equality and Brotherhood were

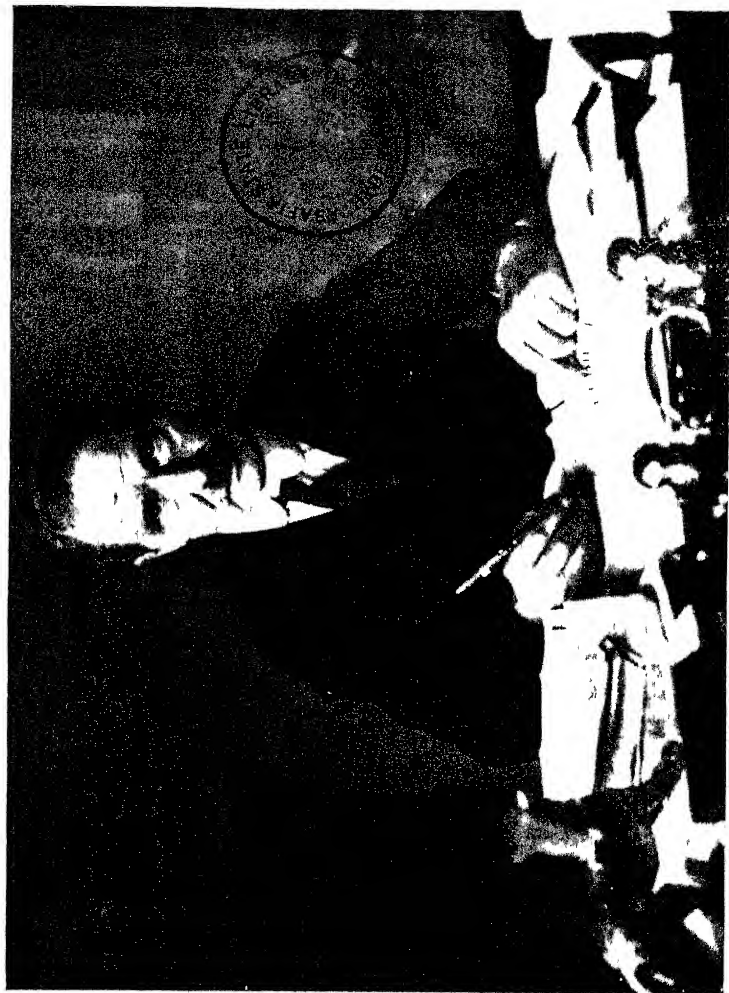


definitely directed towards European domination. From this time, or, more particularly, from the 1795 Budget, began a long period of financial difficulties which Downing Street did little to alleviate.

Coincident with national financial stringency came a period of chaos in the private economics of No. 10. At this time the house was served by no fewer than twenty-seven servants, and for these the wage bill alone amounted to £321 18s.

Pitt's income was now over £10,000 a year, but the lavish entertainment which filled the spacious rooms with ladies and gentlemen of the noblest blood and highest fashion—the vast majority having ample appetites and a generous capacity for the rarest brands of liquor—cost a mint of money to provide. Never before had No. 10 Downing Street seen such pageants of pomp and extravagance. Pitt was deeply in debt. He had the same high disregard for matters of personal finance as had his father. Solicitous for his country's purse, he yet had great disdain for personal economy.

In 1795 he owed over £30,000, and six years later this debt had mounted to over £45,000. As a sample of an ordinary day's fare at No. 10 it is interesting to examine an item picked at random from the household accounts. It refers to January 19th, 1795, and is not concerned with trifling details of vegetables or cakes and pastries, and makes no mention of the florist and fruiterer. Needless to say it does not include provisions for the servants' hall :



MIR A. BONAR LAW



*Fishmonger.*

Lobster,      2 hams to cut,  
Crayfish,    Westphalia Ham,  
3 Soles,

Pea Fowl,  
A Hare,  
Snipes,  
Larks,  
Capon Larded,  
Pheasant roasted.

In the matter of commissariat No. 10 Downing Street does not seem to have been affected by the war with France.

No. 10's war policy was confined, so far as was possible, to advancing money to continental states. Only one or two entirely unimportant expeditions left this country. This was wise, for French arms on land seemed everywhere victorious, the Allied armies being routed again and again. At sea, however, the events were more encouraging. It was one of the strongest points in No. 10's policy that naval armament was our best weapon against France, and that by the increase of our power at sea we could obtain a stranglehold over France that no other means could compass. If Britain made herself fully mistress of the seas then France would be beaten.

The success that attended adherence to this principle has no better witness than the facts of the time. With the increase and support that No. 10 gave to our fleet, it

was successful in crippling the trade of France, which has never since borne the proportion to that of our country which it did before. Britain was everywhere victorious. The two principal French fleets were destroyed and British commerce secured. The help given to France by Spain and Holland was set at naught by the victories of St. Vincent and Camperdown.

Between 1792 and 1800 the strength of our Navy was increased by some 82 per cent and we controlled the trade of the world. Nevertheless, there was much discontent in the Navy. In 1797 there were open mutinies at Spithead and the Nore. In the following year Pitt, eager to push the war to a conclusion, introduced a Bill for the remanning of the Navy. Tierney objected to the measure being rushed through. Pitt lost his temper and accused him of trying to obstruct the defence of the country.

In due course two gentlemen presented themselves at the front door of No. 10 Downing Street. They were admitted and shown into the presence of two of Pitt's friends. There, in the splendid surroundings of the house of the First Lord of the Treasury, these four gentlemen arranged details of the duel which must take place as a result of the Minister's hasty accusation.

Pitt had a house at Putney, and it was arranged that the duel, which, it was decided, should be fought with pistols, should take place on Putney Heath. The life of the most brilliant man in England was in .

jeopardy because of a few hasty words. The duel took place at dawn. Pitt had no quarrel with the man he had insulted in the heat of debate and under the stress of anxiety for his country's welfare, so he fired into the air. No blood was lost. But the duel might well have been fatal, and No. 10 Downing Street in need of a new tenant.

The old doorway at No. 10 during these years was used by one of the stateliest and most dignified figures in history. It was seldom that Pitt let his strong, eager nature get the better of him, as when prompting the impulsive outburst that led to the duel. Regularly, before breakfast each morning, his tall figure, soberly dressed in black, was seen leaving No. 10 for a constitutional in St. James's Park. His height, accentuated by his slimness, gave him a dignity which was made the more imposing by the stiffness of carriage that he affected.

Pitt understood men and so knew well how to win liking and confidence. Even some of No. 10's worst enemies, regarding the house as the home of political evil, could not resist the personal charm of its tenant. Sir William Napier is an excellent example. He was a Whig and once considered Pitt a veritable villain. When he first met the Prime Minister he was astonished, and pleasantly astonished, at the humanity of the great man. He felt at once, he says, "that I had a friend before me with whom I might instantly become familiar to any extent within the bounds of good breeding." The teachings of his political tutors

were in vain. "Thus primed," he adds, "with fierce recollections and patriotic resolves, I endeavoured to sustain my mind's hatred against the Minister, but in vain ; all feelings sunk, except those of surprise and gratification, at finding such a gentle, good-natured, agreeable, understanding companion."

These two had many an argument in No. 10, and no doubt there were times when Napier's friendship was strained by Pitt's directness of speech. The combat of words brought out to advantage one of Pitt's strongest weapons, sarcasm, which he used as a fencing champion might an *épée*, piercing his enemies' strongest defences. As does a good swordsman, he had trained himself into calmness and apparent self-possession that much disconcerted his adversaries.

Unrest in Ireland now led to the resignation of William Pitt and the arrival in Downing Street of a Premier very different in character and ability from his brilliant predecessor. Henry Addington was the son of the very doctor whom some might hold responsible for the quantities of port wine which had found their way into No. 10's cellars during Pitt's occupation of the house. Addington had been Speaker of the House of Commons, and indeed was far better fitted for this post than that of Prime Minister. He was not particularly gifted.

Immediately Addington had taken up his residence in Downing Street Pitt's old and bitter opponents felt safe in endeavouring to discredit the ex-Minister.

To that end they tried to introduce a vote of censure in the House of Commons. Though Pitt was no longer backed by the power of No. 10 Downing Street, they failed dismally, as may be judged from the fact that a vote on the motion that Pitt "had rendered great and important services to the country, and deserves the thanks of the House," was passed by 211 votes to 52.

No. 10 Downing Street now became the scene of much blundering incompetence. Addington had been an ardent, though silent, supporter of Pitt throughout the latter's long administration. He had entered the House of Commons in 1783 as Member for Devizes. Seldom had he uttered a word in the Commons, and was thus admirably fitted to occupy the position of Speaker, which Pitt's influence obtained for him in 1789. It was during his tenure of that post that the Speaker's salary, which had formerly varied somewhat, was fixed at £6000 per annum.

Addington soon became the butt of considerable derision. It is true that an outstandingly able man would have been needed to maintain the standard of political brilliance that had been set by Pitt, but No. 10's new tenant seemed unequal even to the attempt. But if the country as a whole deplored the change, there were many people who rejoiced that Downing Street no longer possessed the quick perception it had displayed for seventeen long years.

The King, for example, was very pleased indeed that No. 10 Downing Street now held a tenant who



was of no greater intellectual attainments than himself. George again had a Minister with whom he could do more or less as he liked, and this was extremely welcome to him after Pitt's haughtiness and determination. The country gentry of those days felt in comfortable sympathy with the stupidity which now pervaded No. 10. With Addington they knew where they were. Like them he was industrious, meant extremely well, was self-satisfied, narrow-minded and bigoted. No. 10 had been denied the Clerkship of the Pells by William Pitt, but on Barré's death the new Premier brought it home once more, bestowing it upon his sixteen-year-old son.

The French War had ended in 1802 in the Peace of Amiens, but Buonaparte's ambition was so obviously insatiable that the country was ready enough to embark upon a fresh struggle when disagreement arose between France and Britain upon the possession of Malta, which really belonged to the Knights of St. John. So on May 16th, 1803, war again broke out. On Addington's appointment to office Pitt had promised his support to the new Ministry, but the feebleness of the policy directed from No. 10 so exasperated its previous tenant that he retired into the country, preferring to take no part in politics to opposing his old friend.

Deprived of Pitt's support, the ineptitude of No. 10's occupant became more apparent than ever. "Pitt is to Addington as London is to Paddington" was a favourite "catch" of the times. On April 30th,

1804, Addington announced his resignation. Later he became temporarily reconciled to Pitt, and in January, 1805, was created Viscount Sidmouth, thus joining the roll of Commoners who have used No. 10 Downing Street as a stepping-stone to the peerage.

On May 10th, 1804, William Pitt was again appointed First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. But never again were things to be the same at No. 10 Downing Street as during Pitt's previous triumphant reign. The new regime was described at the time as being composed of "William and Pitt," and Lord Rosebery called it "null and deplorable." Only one triumph relieved the lengthening shadows over No. 10—when thither was brought the news of the victory of Trafalgar and the consequent failure of Napoleon's plans for the invasion of Britain. It was the last good news that was to be brought to the house before the weight of troubles crushed the life from Pitt's spare frame.

One of the qualities most necessary in any statesman is the faculty of concentration. In Pitt this was very highly developed, and with it went the ability to cast aside all troubles while he rested and refreshed himself, the better to renew his tasks. After the battle of Trafalgar, however, with the joy of victory dimmed by Nelson's death, few nights in No. 10 found Pitt reposed, and sleepless night after sleepless night made more acute the mists of despair that crept through the house.

One day a spent horse, urged by its rider to a last

effort, clattered along Downing Street to come to an exhausted standstill outside the door of No. 10. Inside the house a nerve-racked figure paced restlessly up and down, and then stood rigidly waiting as the courier almost fell from his horse and staggered up to the doorway. Good news or bad? Soon Pitt knew the worst, for the despatches concerned the surrender of Ulm on October 19th.

When the surrender of Ulm was confirmed beyond possibility of doubt a complete alteration was noticeable in Pitt, and from then on he was as a broken man living in the shadow of death. After December 2nd, the date of the battle of Austerlitz, there was no longer any doubt that No. 10 Downing Street would soon receive another tenant. The news of the great defeat was the final blow to Pitt and he grew steadily worse in health. He died on January 23rd, 1806.

If a house can indeed have character then this must be built up from collective impressions of the events which have happened within it, and the people it has sheltered. Pitt lived in No. 10 Downing Street a total of nearly twenty years, and he is possibly the most vivid personality that ever occupied it. If the walls of No. 10 hold memories, those left by this great man must surely be the most enduring. In the famous Cabinet-room many men of vastly different types have prepared their speeches before delivering them in Parliament. One of the most impressive speakers who ever paced the floors of No. 10, addressing an imaginary audience, was William

Pitt the Younger. He was much addicted to gesture, but his speeches must all have been carefully prepared, for he seldom used notes. It was said that though Fox was never without words, Pitt was never without the best words possible.

The opinion of a contemporary—"a civil volunteer"—throws an interesting light on Pitt's life in No. 10 :

"If, in speaking of the late administration," he says, "I have mentioned only the name of Mr. Pitt, it is because under that name was comprised all the excellence which rendered it, at any time, respectable, or obtained for it any degree of public favour; but even that gentleman's most valuable endowment, was his eloquence."

Often it is the "off moments" of great men which endear them to us more than the practical benefits they bestow upon us. Though No. 10 Downing Street may strike many observers as having a reserved, unapproachable exterior, yet within it has been the scene of many touching, human incidents, and these were not lacking in Pitt's time—though he himself "never seemed to invite approach, or to encourage acquaintance."

A delightful little episode is recorded by Sir William Napier. Apparently one afternoon he, Lady Hester Stanhope, Charles and James Stanhope, and Pitt were engaged in a rough-and-tumble in one of the rooms of the Prime Minister's house. It was the

purpose of Pitt's opponents to black his face with some burnt cork. Suddenly Lord Castlereagh and Lord Liverpool were announced. Hastily Pitt made himself presentable, and the noblemen were admitted.

Amazingly incongruous it seemed to the rest of this merry party—somewhat unused to thinking of No. 10 Downing Street in its strictly official capacity—to watch these two great and solemn men “bending like spaniels” before the playmate with whom but a few minutes before they had been rolling on the floor. There was greater surprise still at the change in Pitt's manner—“his tall, ungainly, bony figure seemed to grow to the ceiling, his head was thrown back, his eyes fixed immovably in one position, as if reading the Heavens, and totally regardless of the bending figures near him.” After the dismissal of the great men the horseplay recommenced with no less vigour than before.

Even in January, 1806, when he was very near death, Pitt could not bear the thought that No. 10 should show a closed and inhospitable door to guests whom he had invited to a dinner in honour of the Queen's birthday, and from his sick-bed in Putney he sent Lady Hester Stanhope to deputise for him.

His last words were : “Oh, my country ! How I leave my country !” No more would the stately rooms of No. 10 Downing Street be lent added stateliness by his presence ; no more would his eyes, the most brilliant imaginable, gaze through the windows over the restful green of St. James's Park. Like the

house, his appearance was imposing rather than prepossessing.

It is probable that no occupant of No. 10 spent as much money while living in the house as did Pitt. When he first had come to live there his sister, Lady Harriet Pitt, had managed his affairs, but when she left the house to get married chaos ensued, and debts accumulated fast. On his death Pitt left debts amounting to over £40,000—exclusive of an additional sum of £11,700 which he had borrowed privately. The nation paid his debts as willingly as it has always paid the cost of No. 10's repairs, and the friends who had subscribed the £11,700 loan refused repayment, indeed a great tribute. It had cost not a little to provide Pitt with his rich port wine complexion. "Mr. Pitt likes a glass of port very well, and a bottle better," said Addington in explanation. Pitt's three nieces were granted pensions, and on February 22nd, 1806, a public funeral in his honour took place at Westminster Abbey.

Of the diversity of people who have known No. 10 at one time or another, most of those who ultimately occupied it in official capacities have been frequent visitors before becoming tenants. The next man to come to the house had known it intimately many years previously when, as a four-year-old, he had romped about the rooms during the time his father, George Grenville, was First Lord of the Treasury.

William Wyndham Grenville was the youngest son

and his career from early days had marked him out for No. 10. A cousin of William Pitt and one of that great man's most fervent supporters, he had been Paymaster-General, a Privy Councillor, and, since January 5th, 1789, Speaker of the House of Commons. After Pitt's death and Lord Hawkesbury's refusal to undertake the leadership Grenville formed a Ministry composed of the leaders of the three parties which had been in opposition during Pitt's last tragic years in No. 10. The "Ministry of All the Talents" it was called. Henry Addington, now Viscount Sidmouth and an ex-tenant of No. 10, was Lord Privy Seal. Fox was Foreign Secretary.

There was much similarity between the new tenant of No. 10 and his father. Both the Grenvilles were well respected in their time, but little liked. It will be remembered that George Grenville had been called "tedious and tactless" and in this respect his son accurately resembled him. It is said of Grenville that his speeches, though clear and full of authority and argument, tended to be heavy, pompous and tedious. Of his tactlessness, more in due course—for it was the cause of his leaving No. 10. The industry of either father or son could not, though, be questioned, and there was little in the life of either to the discredit of their honesty.

However much Lord Grenville's good qualities won him respect, his "cold and unsympathetic manners" earned him unpopularity. Despite his much-vaunted good qualities, however, Grenville

seems unblushingly to have favoured the cultivation of sinecures. Little credit reflects upon him for the first measure that was carried in Parliament under his administration. He held the post of Auditor of the Exchequer (a nice, comfortable sinecure) when appointed First Lord, and would in the usual course of events have had to give it up—but the measure, swiftly devised and as swiftly passed, enabled him to retain the post by means of a proxy, thus keeping its emoluments in effect for himself. It is of interest to note that the lawyer who contrived the means to enable Grenville to bring home his sinecure to No. 10 was none other than Spencer Perceval, who himself was shortly to occupy the historic house.

The new First Lord had been appointed on February 11th, 1806. On April 3rd a letter was received by the Office of Works asking for an Estimate for repairs required at No. 10 Downing Street. Charles Alexander Craig, who will be remembered as the second of the foremen in charge of the earlier repairs, reports from the Office of Works (in the absence of James Wyatt, Esq.) on the 18th of the month that :  
“ . . . owing to the bad state of repair of the House of the First Lord of the Treasury the necessary work to be done there will amount to about £2200 and certainly cannot be compleated in less than a fortnight.”

It appears that this report has been somewhat carelessly worded. The impression one receives is that over £2000 worth of work was to be executed in



fourteen days. One is safe in presuming, however, that the work had been begun a good while beforehand, and wanted only a fortnight to its completion. The amusing twist to this report is that it should be made by Mr. Craig, then apparently on the staff of the Office of Works, regarding the bad condition of premises, repairs to which he had himself superintended only twenty-two years before.

This period of No. 10's existence is most noteworthy on account of the strenuous efforts that were then made for the abolition of the Slave Trade, and for the emancipation of the Catholics. Grenville's efforts in favour of the former reached fruition on the very same day that his endeavours in the interests of the latter brought about the end of his tenancy of No. 10 Downing Street.

Grenville had said that Wilberforce's speech on the Slave Trade, in 1789, "entitled him to the thanks of the House, of the people of England, of all Europe, and of the latest posterity." As tenant of No. 10 he may be said himself to have earned like thanks when, in conjunction with Fox, he carried resolutions for the abolition of the nefarious commerce in June, 1806. In September, 1806, Fox died, and thereafter all the necessary work came from No. 10. There a Bill was prepared, and thence introduced into Parliament in January, 1807. This Bill carried the previous Resolutions into effect.

Shortly, Downing Street and the Crown came into conflict over the question of Catholic Emancipation.

On March 5th Lord Howick—who is perhaps better known by his subsequent title of Earl Grey, and who, as such, was a later tenant of No. 10—introduced a Bill, the Roman Catholic Army and Navy Service Bill, with the object of permitting entry into the Services, of Catholics and Dissenters alike. The King immediately stated that under no circumstances would he give his assent to such a measure.

Long, and probably tedious, were the discussions in No. 10 following the King's obstinacy—though a little forethought would have led the Ministers to expect nothing else. In this dispute with the King Grenville displayed as singular a want of tact as any statesman has ever shown in his relations with the Sovereign. In the Minute acquainting the King of the fact that the Bill was to be dropped he and his supporters reserved the right "openly to avow their opinions in Parliament" with regard to the claims of the Catholics, and to offer to the King in future such advice with regard to Ireland "as the course of circumstance shall appear to require."

Surely the walls of the Cabinet room of No. 10, remembering the traditions of former more courteous and less stupid Prime Ministers, must have yearned for voices to rebuke this tactless man. Such remarks were both redundant and unnecessarily impertinent. The King was annoyed and provoked, and demanded a positive assurance that never again should he be approached by the Ministry for concessions to the Catholics. This assurance Grenville refused to give,

and accordingly the King avowed his intention of finding someone to occupy No. 10 Downing Street who would do so.

Wits of the time may have considered that No. 10 would stand more solidly had Grenville been built into the walls during the 1806 repairs, for Sheridan observed : " I have known many men knock their heads against a wall, but I have never before heard of any man who collected the bricks and built the very wall with an intention to knock out his own brains against it."

Grenville's tenancy of No. 10 came to an end with his dismissal on March 25th, the very day that the Slave Trade Bill, for which No. 10 Downing Street had done so much hard work, received the Royal Assent.

## CHAPTER VII

### "TWENTY YEARS OF FAILURE"

ugal incompetence—No. 10 the apex of a triangle—No. 10 causes a duel—  
Murder !—Rothschild and No. 10—Finance and folly—More repairs—  
Many false moves.

ONCE more the kitchens of No. 10 Downing Street sent up dishes to ducal dinners. Whether they bore the toads which the duke of Portland was maliciously reputed to be so fond of, or more dainty and attractive meats, it is doubtful whether His Grace consumed them with any great enjoyment.

No. 10 no longer held attractions for the Duke of Portland. He was most unwilling to take office at all—old, infirm, and quite incapable of adequately discharging the duties of Prime Minister, nobody would have been less suited to occupy No. 10 Downing Street, but for the fact that he was the only man under whom those rival firebrands—Canning and Castlereagh—would agree to serve. It was only his high sense of public duty which led him to accept office, though the real power was to be bickered for by the contentious pair who nominally owed allegiance to No. 10, yet set its authority at naught.

Under these circumstances it is not at all surprising that little would have pleased the old man better than

never again in an official capacity to have eaten another meal in No. 10. So the Duke of Portland's second stay in Downing Street—he was First Lord of the Treasury on this occasion, between 1807 and 1809—was a sorry tenancy indeed.

No. 10 now found itself in an extremely awkward position. Its master failed miserably to make proper use of his authority. When Canning threatened to withdraw his support the Duke was afraid to accept his resignation and agreed instead to dismiss Castlereagh. Either course, the defection of Canning or the dismissal of Castlereagh, was extremely distasteful to the Duke of Portland, and though for the moment he had committed himself to the latter, he found its contemplation so unpleasant that he delayed. In due time Castlereagh heard, indirectly, exactly what had happened. Immediately he sent a challenge to Canning, and on September 21st the two met in combat on Putney Heath.

This duel, the cause of which lay at the door of No. 10 Downing Street, was fought with pistols. The first shots went wide, but when second shots were fired a button flew from Lord Castlereagh's coat, and Canning staggered as he received his opponent's charge in the thigh. By a fortunate chance he was not seriously hurt, and even succeeded in walking from the duelling ground. This duel, however, had a tragic sequel. The Duke of Portland resigned office, and had only left No. 10 a few days when he died, broken-hearted.

No. 10 has drawn her tenants from many different walks of life, but perhaps more have come to the house by way of the Law than any other profession. Spencer Perceval, the next tenant, had already made a name for himself in the legal profession before he became Chancellor of the Exchequer. Romilly, who had come into contact with him on circuit, and who, throughout his life, remained his firm friend, described him as “with very little reading, of a conversation barren of instruction, and with strong and invincible prejudices on many subjects; yet by his excellent temper, his engaging manners, and his sprightly conversation he was the delight of all who knew him.”

No. 10's new tenant may have been a bigoted man, but while he lived in the house he upheld the best of its traditions, and the high political morals which should indeed be traditional to the home of the Prime Ministers, and which on occasions did actually pay the old house a visit. Neither the sinecures whose old familiar roosts were the lofts and rafters of No. 10 Downing Street, nor the various political pluckings which feathered many a Prime Minister's personal nest, appealed to Spencer Perceval.

Though his income was small—quite inadequate for the upkeep of No. 10—and his family large, he was far less self-seeking than was common in that day. This trait became more than ever noticeable when, two years later, Perceval became First Lord of the Treasury. He thought that the Prime Minister

should not also be Chancellor. So when forming his Cabinet he endeavoured to relieve No. 10 of the duty of acting as Chancellery. But he was unsuccessful, though he offered the post of Chancellor to no fewer than five different people. Eventually he had to assume the office himself.

It is a further tribute to Perceval's disinterestedness that he would accept no extra salary on this account. It seems remarkable that later he should have vigorously opposed Banke's Bill for the abolition of sinecure offices. Not all the forces of No. 10, however, could long stay this admirable reform. The Bill was carried on the second reading by the narrow margin of nine votes, a remarkable result when one considers that many of the men who voted had chances, vague or promising, of sinecure offices for themselves.

Perceval was not a distinguished orator. When he could sit at home in No. 10 and prepare his speeches with care and attention he managed well enough, but in Parliament he found himself somewhat at sea from the first. When unable first to take counsel of himself in No. 10 on all details and angles of approach, Perceval became extremely nervous, fidgeted and stammered, and generally made a hash of his orations. This naturally tended to make No. 10 the butt of ridicule. But popular opinion of its tenant was improved after the failure of a vicious attempt, by one Maddock, to associate him with corruption over the sale of Parliamentary seats.

Perceval was a thin, wan little man who united a

blameless private life with violent reactionary views. In the course of its history No. 10 has housed people of violently opposed religious opinions ; but, though disgraced by Dashwood's satanism, it has usually been the home of sincere men, straightforward according to their lights. Perceval was a highly religious, church-going Protestant, and thus during his occupation No. 10 stood as a rock amidst the rising popular agitation for Catholic emancipation. In this matter Perceval strenuously resisted the tide of progress.

The Peninsular War was the outstanding event of Perceval's occupation of No. 10. The Premier and Wellesley did not get on uniformly well. The General complained that No. 10 was starving him of supplies, and Perceval's reply was that the General was unnecessarily extravagant. By his single-minded determination Perceval maintained the national courage, continued the war, and contrived Budgets that were not by any means as unsatisfactory as might have been expected. He did this despite the fact that he was liable to lose the support of the Crown from time to time, George still being liable to occasional bouts of insanity.

When this happened No. 10 adhered to the policy Pitt had vigorously supported in 1788. It will be remembered that the Opposition had then endeavoured to instal the Prince of Wales as Regent, with unrestricted powers. A similar attempt was made when the King became ill following Perceval's entry into Downing Street. No. 10 again stood firm, and



restrictions on the power of the Regency were proposed. No. 10 has had no greater menace to its constitutional authority than these attacks. Again it was successful, despite Canning's opposition.

When the Prince assumed the Regency His Majesty was well on the way to recovery, and dearly though the Prince would have liked to oust No. 10's tenant, he realised that he would merely be reinstated when the King was again fit to attend to public affairs. However, in 1810, George III at last became permanently insane. There was no hope of his ever again being able to understand what was going on around him, and so, in the following year, his eldest son, George, was made Regent. The old King died peacefully in 1820.

The personal security of British Prime Ministers is a source of wonder and admiration to most foreigners. Only one has been assassinated—Spencer Perceval. Not many years ago Clemenceau was being shown over No. 10 by Lloyd George, and the painting of Spencer Perceval was pointed out to him as the only one of Britain's Premiers who had met with death at the hands of an assassin. "What a marvellous Police Force you must have!" the Tiger remarked.

Perceval was killed when passing through the lobby of the House of Commons. It was on May 11th, 1812, and he had been called from No. 10 unexpectedly. A man rushed up to the Prime Minister, thrust a pistol at his chest and fired. Perceval died almost immediately. The murderer was arrested in

spite of the clamour and confusion. He was a bankrupt named Bellingham, who had a fancied grudge against the Government. Obviously he was insane, but his plea to this effect was set aside at his trial, which took place four days after the murder, while his victim, who in the meantime had lain in state in No. 10 Downing Street, was taken to burial at Charlton. Two days later Bellingham was hanged.

During the years that this tragedy brought to a close, No. 10 had done much to improve Britain's prestige on the Continent. The period is an oasis of forceful administration in the midst of much weakness and incompetence. Perceval left six sons and six daughters. Unlike some others who have served their country faithfully in No. 10, his labours were not unrewarded. Gratitude for what he had done during his time in the House was expressed by a grant to his widow of fifty thousand pounds in cash, with an annuity of two thousand pounds.

The next tenant in No. 10 was another deeply religious man, Nicholas Vansittart. Vansittart was mild in temperament and possessed little brilliance. He was no orator. He lived in Downing Street for nearly eleven years, and during this period, critical politically and financially, he achieved several notable pieces of financial folly. In short, his work has often been regarded very unfavourably. However, in his favour it should be said that his views were moderate and that he always gave consideration to the opinions

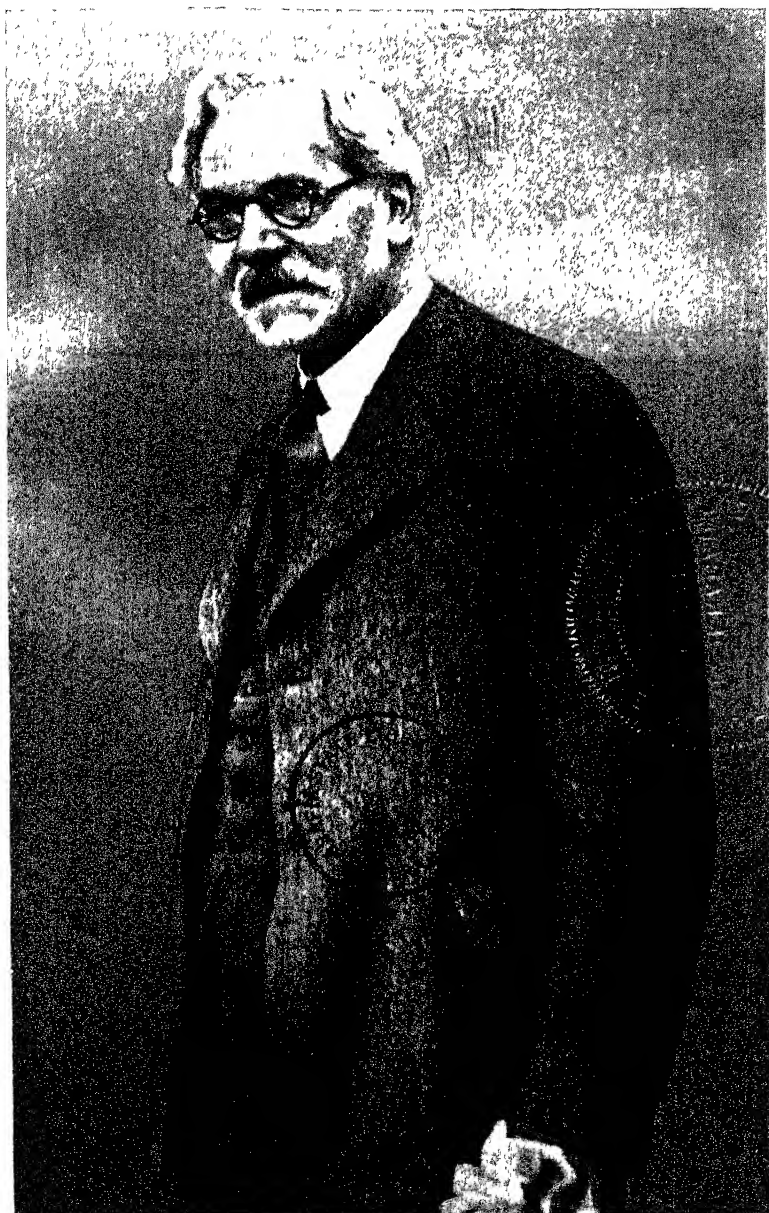
of others. Furthermore, at the close of his term of office, Great Britain's revenue was two million pounds in excess of its expenditure.

Vansittart was a lawyer, but he had not practised for any length of time, nor with any of Perceval's success. When he left the northern circuit and turned his attention to London he was at first to be found among the "bright young people" of the society of the day, but soon settled down to more serious occupations. The best that can be said for him is that he was one of the most inoffensive men ever to inhabit No. 10, and the worst, that he was one of the most mediocre.

Vansittart was appointed to the Exchequer nine days after Perceval's assassination ; May 20th. His first task was to put forward the Budget prepared by his unfortunate predecessor. The Budget was adopted without radical change, but in place of Perceval's tax on private breweries Vansittart increased the tax on carriages, horses, dogs, and male servants.

The first financial proposals which issued from No. 10 under its new tenant were known as the "Plan of Finance." The immense complications of this scheme caused people to exclaim : "Aha ! At last we have a *real* financier at No. 10 !" But, unfortunately for Downing Street's prestige, it was soon realised that once the complications were sorted out into so many plain words the Plan of Finance was a mere miracle of pointless ingenuity.

That the country's finances were maintained upon



MR. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD



a reasonably firm footing during an anxious period and in face of great difficulties is probably attributable in great measure to the help and guidance that Vansittart received from the famous Rothschild. In these days No. 10 grew familiar with the lean figure of the celebrated banker. It was as a result of many consultations there with the Chancellor that he undertook to collect gold secretly on the Continent for the payment of the vast expenses of the war.

One of the most dramatic incidents of the period occurring in No. 10 happened on June 20th, 1815. Rothschild was famous for the mysteriously swift news service that he maintained for the purposes of his business, and on the morning of that day he received tidings of the victory at Waterloo. He had the news conveyed direct to his friend in Downing Street. No. 10 was only the second house in England to hear of the victory, and received the great news fully a day before official intimation arrived. Vansittart conveyed the information to his fellow-Ministers, who were at first frankly incredulous, and feared to have faith in the accuracy of the report until next day, when Wellington's despatch arrived to convince a doubting Government.

Fierce and general depression followed the winning of the war. Once again there came to No. 10 the knowledge that there is little difference in cost between defeat and victory. The 1815 Budget revealed an expenditure far larger than had ever before been known. The figure was £79,839,300,

and the Exchequer had to issue loans on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

Mention of this sum reminds one that, some 750 years previously, the whole of Westminster had been valued at a mere £10. This figure was quoted in Domesday Book, and probably the Downing Street site would then have been worth not more than a few shillings.

Vansittart produced many remedies to meet the situation, and most of them were economically unsound. At last he evolved a scheme of loans to finance the pensions, on contract. This was the final straw to a large stack of economic foolishness, and it made a change of tenancy imperative. How low No. 10's reputation for finance had sunk may be judged from the description of this last extravagant plan as "the most curious specimen of the most ruinous species of borrowing that the wit of man could devise."

Even Vansittart's most loyal friends and supporters were relieved when he and No. 10 Downing Street parted company. He retired from office in December, 1822. He vacated the house early in 1823, joining the Cabinet as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. On March 1st he was created Baron Bexley and granted a yearly pension of £3000—which shows that No. 10 does not always discriminate greatly between those that have distinguished themselves well as its tenants and those that have only distinguished themselves for incompetence. For the rest of his life

Nicholas Vansittart devoted himself mainly to pious and charitable works. He was President of the British and Foreign Bible Mission and did much to assist religious enterprises.

Frederick John Robinson was Chancellor of the Exchequer when he moved into No. 10 in the early part of 1823. He stayed until 1827. Then, after a short absence, he returned to the House through late 1827 and early 1828 as Prime Minister. This period was one of change. No. 10 underwent further extensive repairs and rebuilding, and the whole face of Downing Street was altered.

No. 10's new tenant was popular. He began his four years in office with a Budget surplus of seven million pounds. The country's finances must have appeared to the people of those days as being extremely prosperous, and No. 10 was for a while the most popular house in the country. But soon curses replaced blessings. Meanwhile, however, when the Budget was presented in Parliament it received "demonstrations of applause more loud and more general than perhaps ever before greeted the opening of a ministerial statement of finance." Five million pounds was apportioned for the reduction of debt and the remainder for the purpose of lightening taxation.

Robinson was a man of taste and discrimination. He decorated his house with furniture and pictures which showed him to be a connoisseur. For the first time in its existence No. 10 became the home of a



patron of the Arts who also wished to improve the national taste. During the first year of his tenancy Robinson obtained a grant of forty thousand pounds towards the erection of "the buildings at the British Museum for the reception of the Royal Library."

At this period encouragement—in the practical form of financial support—came to Art in many parts of the country from No. 10 Downing Street. For example, when the country had an unexpected wind-fall in the repayment by Austria of part of a large sum of money lent her by Britain, much of this payment was secured by No. 10 for the assistance of Art. Fifty-seven thousand pounds were spent in buying the Angerstein collection "by way of laying the foundation of a National Gallery of Works of Art." Secondly, Windsor Castle was badly in need of attention and the sum of three hundred thousand pounds was appropriated to this purpose. Finally, half a million pounds were granted for the building of new churches.

Since the days of Pitt no speaker of merit had lived in No. 10; Robinson was a mild exception in this tongue-tied sequence. Though in his speeches he was apt to wander from the point, it was said of him that "the art which he possessed of enlivening even dry subjects of finance with classical allusions and pleasant humour made his speeches always acceptable to a large majority of his hearers." Robinson was not happy concerning the appearance of his house in

Downing Street. Whether or not he brought any personal pressure to bear in this matter, certainly it was during the early days of his occupation that drastic renovations were put in hand. Indeed, shortly the whole character of Downing Street was changed by the work which started in 1825.

The Soane alterations and repairs embraced far more than the Prime Minister's house, but it is of importance to speak only of those that affected the ancient building, which in this year gained the title of No. 10, having previously been numbered No. 5 in the street. Soane constructed a new dining-room. A passageway was built, and new cupboard arrangements were made. An ante-room, which formed part of the alterations, is now used as a breakfast-room. Soane estimated the cost of these affairs at between eighteen hundred and two thousand pounds, and they were completed in the following year, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer's house is mentioned among reports on progress made in buildings "in the Westminster Department" up to January 24th, 1826, when, say the records :

"The New dining-room, Ante Room, Closets, and the Passage of communication therewith, are complete and fit for occupation."

Thus it is seen that these works were in the nature of additions, not structural repairs or alterations. The previous repairs were not yet in need of reconstruction, though this was imminent and took place about

four years later. At this time No. 10 can have been used little as an office, for the additions were obviously for private comfort and convenience. Subsequent tenants used it more and more as an office, and eventually the time came when it was used for no other purpose.

While these works were in progress the prophesied prosperity did not eventuate. By the end of the year the country was involved in a bad slump. Though No. 10 Downing Street officially instigated the Government's financial measures, Huskisson was generally regarded as being the real power. Rothschild was continually in prominence, and his opinions and advice were conveyed to the Government by the Duke of Wellington and embodied in the policy of the administration.

No. 10 was criticised bitterly. Despite widespread poverty and distress Robinson refused to admit that there was a crisis at all. There is no doubt whatever that on this occasion No. 10 deliberately attempted to hoodwink the House into believing the country to be in a better condition than it really was. "Prosperity House" was No. 10's nickname at this time, for its tenant was known as "Prosperity Robinson." By contrast, the principal thorn in the political flesh of the Government was "Adversity Hume."

When Hume proposed that the causes of distress should be investigated a most curious situation evolved in Parliament. The opponents both proved their

cases with valiant arrays of figures, none of which were open to question. As Martineau says: “A more curious instance can scarcely be found than in the addresses of ‘Prosperity Robinson’ and ‘Adversity Hume,’ of the opposite conclusions which may be drawn from a view of a statistical subject where the figures were indisputable on both sides, as far as they went.”

Soon Robinson conveyed to Lord Liverpool his anxiety to be rid of the responsibilities of No. 10 in exchange for less irksome duties and a place in the House of Lords. The Premier, however, asked him to remain in office and thus he was still at No. 10 when Canning became Prime Minister. He was created Viscount Goderich on April 28th, 1827, shortly after he had left No. 10.

Most of those who had recently occupied No. 10 Downing Street had at one time or another been in conflict, political or otherwise, with the great George Canning. It will be remembered that No. 10 had been the cause of his duel with Castlereagh, an incident which had rid the house of the unhappy tenancy of the Duke of Portland.

It was on April 10th, 1827, that No. 10's new tenant was appointed. George IV, irritated by the over-anxiety of Peel and Wellington to move in, decided that Canning should select the new Ministry. As has been the case with many others, Canning's short spell as Premier—his stay in No. 10 Downing Street lasted less than four months—was an extremely

unpleasant and unthankful time for him. His bad health had indirectly caused his tenancy of No. 10. The news of a severe attack of rheumatic fever which overtook Canning at Brighton threw Lord Liverpool into a fit and precipitated the change of Ministry. Many of those who have inhabited No. 10 have found that the cares of their tenancy have hastened the end of their days. Once in No. 10, Canning continued to suffer severe recurrences of fever, and on one occasion told the King that he felt "ill all over."

As with most others who have moved into No. 10 with the idea that they would still keep their friends, Canning at once found that those who had once been his supporters were now his enemies. With a sick man as its tenant, No. 10 could do little to maintain a balance between the political extremists, and the days of this man who had so long been its enemy were numbered. On August 8th he died.

No. 10 once again received F. J. Robinson, now Lord Goderich. This time he was Prime Minister. Most of those for whom Downing Street has been a stepping-stone to the House of Lords have been wise enough not again to venture into No. 10. Not so Lord Goderich, who then was probably one of the most unsuitable people to occupy the house. Again Downing Street proved incapable of maintaining a political balance. In Parliament, Herries, who, at the King's wish and to the disgust of the Whig Party, was created Chancellor of the Exchequer, was continually

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in violent conflict with Huskisson. No. 10 was quite unable to keep the peace, and matters were made more difficult by the King's refusal to allow Goderich to strengthen his Cabinet by the inclusion of Lord Wellesley and Lord Holland.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FIFTY YEARS OF DRUDGERY

Wellington : parade ground tactics in No. 10—Bathurst : No. 10 for once without enemies—Grey : Downing Street sponsors Reform—More repairs and their cost—No. 10 is secretaries' roost—The house desolate.

TOWARDS the end of 1827 there were rumours that Lord Grey would be No. 10's next tenant. But there is no doubt that this gentleman did not seek the honour thus wished upon him. In an amusing letter the Princess de Lieven, wife of the Russian Ambassador, tells Grey that she, for one, will not give credence to the rumours as she knows from his own lips his unwillingness to become First Lord. Princess de Lieven had a strong sense of humour, and wit which she sometimes used to the considerable discomfiture of persons in high places, for when Lord Goderich resigned on December 15th, pleading that his wife's ill-health distracted him too much from his duties, she wrote :

“Some changes are going on in the Cabinet. Lady Goderich, they say, is no longer willing to remain Premier. This is very comprehensible, but who is there to take her place ?”

Lord Goderich withdrew his resignation, but resigned once more on January 8th, 1828. Next day

the Duke of Wellington was asked to form a Ministry. We have already had several examples of No. 10 and its responsibilities being distasteful to a tenant. No more striking instance of this is available than the Duke of Wellington's reluctance to become First Lord of the Treasury. The Duke's political opponents had already once ascribed to him the desire to take office in No. 10. His reply then was: "His Majesty knew as well as I did that I was, and must be totally, out of the question . . . (for) . . . a station to the duties of which I was not accustomed, in which I was not wished, and for which I was not qualified." Actually he surrendered his command on his appointment to No. 10 most reluctantly.

No. 10 received the Duke early in August, 1828. His furniture had been moved from Apsley House, which was to be considerably repaired. Probably he moved in on August 11th. Difficulties had already arisen. No. 10 was unfortunate in being the meeting-place of a Cabinet composed of people of widely divergent political views. In order to strengthen his position the Duke had had to include four of Canning's old supporters—Huskisson, Palmerston, Dudley and Grant. These men were naturally at variance with the Tory element on almost every subject. At Cabinet meetings in No. 10 the predominant feeling then must have been one of exasperation, for nothing ever seemed to get done in spite of protracted arguments.

In No. 10 Wellington fought battles which were



more arduous to him than anything he had met on the Continent. He had his successes, but they were few, and it was only a matter of time before he crashed. He had admitted himself to be quite unfitted for the position of Prime Minister. Though he might know all the intricacies of manœuvres on the field of battle he was quite unequal to the underhand methods of his political adversaries. He had no Brigade of Guards to meet an open charge or to take the attack themselves, but had to combat enemies who seldom came out into the open, and fought from ambush with the deadly weapons of slander and calumny. As well expect No. 10 to turn into barracks as the Duke of Wellington to make a good First Lord ; yet comment of the time persisted in comparing the Duke's genius for war with his ineptitude for politics. Those who attended the Cabinet meetings in No. 10 complained that he brought the manner of the parade-ground to them and endeavoured to drill his colleagues into compliance with his wishes. If he tried to do so he was unsuccessful, as can be judged from the indecisive results of most of the conferences at No. 10 between the Ministers and their leader.

How difficult was No. 10's task with enemies within the camp it is needless to stress, though these enemies were supposed to be giving it support in exchange for a certain amount of political compromise. Indeed, they thought themselves necessary to No. 10, but the Duke was not so sure. The Canning-

ites definitely did not believe that an exclusively Tory Cabinet could stand.

On May 20th, 1828, Palmerston and Huskisson put their positions as supporters of No. 10 secondary to their political beliefs and voted against the Government. For the look of the thing Huskisson felt it incumbent upon him to tender his resignation, though it is doubtful if he believed for a moment that it would be accepted. Much to the surprise of himself and his friends, no mention of the matter was made by Wellington or any suggestion that he should withdraw.

Dudley went to No. 10 probably thinking that its tenant was showing more than usual political stupidity, and endeavoured to explain the situation. Though he may have approached No. 10 with the intention of being patient and conciliatory, his feelings can be imagined as he walked down the front steps with the Duke's words in his ears: "There is no mistake—there can be no mistake—and there shall be no mistake." From then on No. 10 was exclusively a Tory stronghold, for naturally the other three Whigs resigned in sympathy with Huskisson.

At this time No. 10 had not even the support of the King, who was strongly influenced by the Duke of Cumberland, a violent opponent of Catholic emancipation. It will be remembered that Grenville had ended his tenancy of No. 10 by his tactless Minute to the King, when abandoning the Roman Catholic Army and Navy Service Bill introduced in 1807 by

Earl Grey (then Lord Howick). Since that time any questions of concession to the Catholics had been avoided. But they were definitely raised on January 15th, 1829.

Wellington favoured a policy of compromise, and it was his business to obtain the Royal consent to the matter being raised in Parliament. The Duke of Cumberland spared no effort to defame the Premier, and the King said one thing and then another, keeping to neither. This was the unsatisfactory state of affairs when No. 10 ceased to be the residence of the First Lord of the Treasury. Apsley House was repaired and Wellington came less and less to No. 10. After his appointment as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports on January 20th, 1829, he spent much of his time at Walmer Castle.

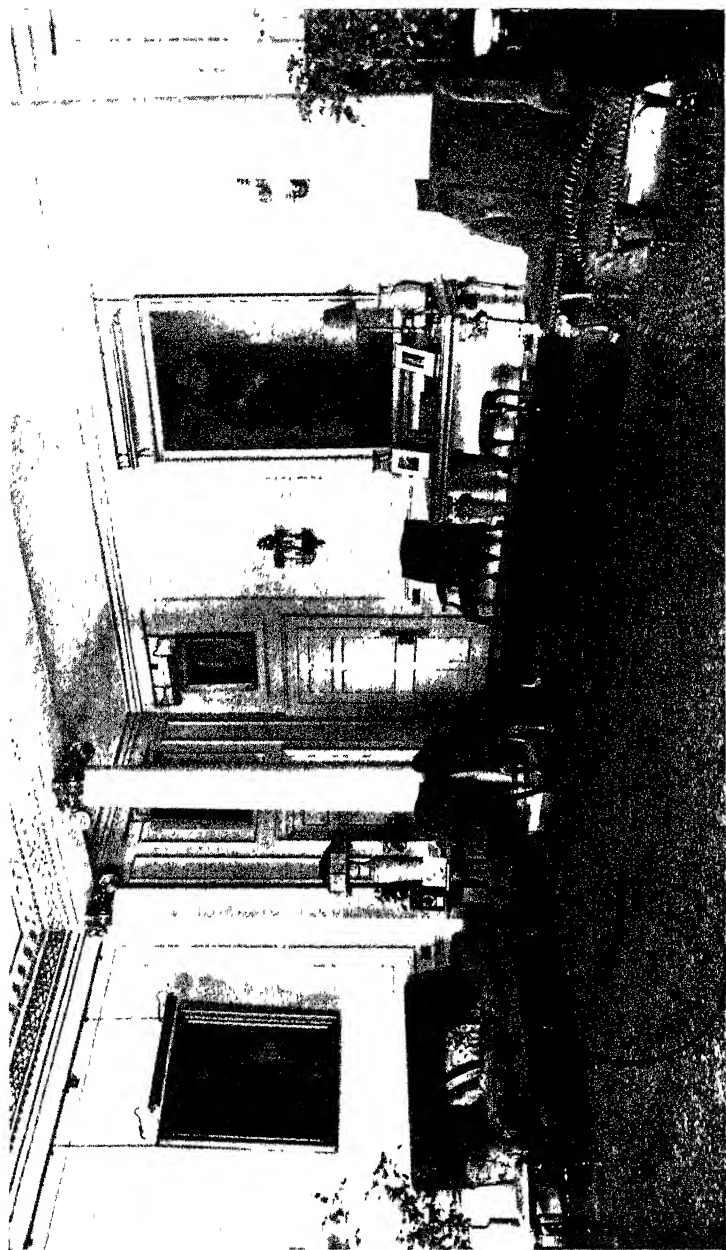
Thus it happened that No. 10 Downing Street became used almost exclusively for purely official purposes, the "business" side of the office of First Lord of the Treasury. This continued until 1877. Lord Bathurst, who occupied the house for a few months, was neither Prime Minister nor Chancellor of the Exchequer. Lord Grey, it is true, was resident from 1830 to 1834, but he had to move out for repairs. Other than these men the only occupants during this period of nearly fifty years were Secretaries to various Premiers.

Before Wellington left No. 10 an event of some importance occurred. For the second time a Prime Minister of Britain was forced to participate in a duel.

Sitting at his desk one day Wellington read the copy of the *Standard* in which was printed a letter from Lord Winchilsea, blatantly accusing him of dishonest dealing. There was only one course open, as no apology was forthcoming. A challenge was issued. The scene for this encounter was set at Battersea, and it was a somewhat tame affair. On the word to fire, the Duke immediately levelled his pistol, but seeing that his opponent had made no move, altered his aim and discharged his pistol into space. Winchilsea then fired into the sky, and after a certain amount of quibbling tendered an apology in an agreed form. The Duke remained unruffled and aloof during the whole proceedings. Indeed, he does not seem to have disturbed the routine of whatever business he had that morning in No. 10.

It is interesting to have an idea of what manner of house it was from which the Iron Duke stepped out to take part in this somewhat ridiculous duel. An admirable picture is afforded in a report issued on December 11th, 1829, a report probably intended to decide whether the house was in good condition to receive the next tenant :

“ This is a large old Building which has been altered, and added to, at many different periods,” ran this report, “ and tho’ in a substantial condition requires very frequent repairs. The Stables belonging to this residence are in a very dilapidated state, and will soon be taken down, as it is understood that others have been



*H. M. Office of Works*

**THE DRAWING-ROOM**

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Street which there is no reason to suppose was other than comfortable, but he chose to move into Downing Street, although for the time No. 10 seems to have been out of fashion. It would be petty to suggest that No. 10 made its appeal in this instance because it was rent free. At the best of times it is an extremely expensive house to run, and the constant repairs it required, though paid for by the public, were both awkward and inconvenient for any tenant.

Moreover, at this time it was obvious that the Duke of Wellington would not long remain in office and therefore the tenancy of No. 10 was a matter of doubtful duration. That Bathurst considered it worth while to suffer the expense and trouble of moving into No. 10 Downing Street when it might be a matter of a few weeks only before he would experience a like inconvenience on moving out again, argues some personal attachment to the house. In the issue he stayed rather longer than had at first seemed probable. On February 10th he held a kind of house-warming. On November 16th Earl Grey was privately ordered to attend the King at St. James's, and asked to undertake the forming of a new administration.

Grey was then living in Berkeley Square. In due course his appointment was officially confirmed, and On December 7th, 1830, he was already living in No. 10. Previously, when rumour had nearly moved him into No. 10, he had been neither ready nor willing to go, but now he was delighted, and his

pleasure and pride were shared by the Princess de Lieven.

Many were the letters that he wrote her from the historic house in Downing Street, confiding his anxieties, hopes, fears. In these he had only one grudge against No. 10—that the duties the tenancy entailed took up so much of his time that he had increasingly less opportunity of seeing her. But Grey was too old when he came to No. 10 for his work to be really effective. When he moved into the house he was sixty-six years of age and had been out of office for fourteen years. At one time he had been a strong supporter of Charles James Fox, who all his life was a bitter enemy of No. 10 Downing Street. Indeed, there was no surer way to keep the door of that house securely barred than to be an associate of Fox. But for Grey's friendship with Fox he might have found himself in Downing Street far sooner than he did.

No. 10, in its time, had been besieged by fanatics and rioters of many different creeds and complexions. In modern times many of us can remember the Suffragettes, whose form of protest was to chain themselves to the railings. In Disraeli's Premiership the house was haunted by the "unfortunate Tracy Turnerelli," a very harmless if irritating pesterer.

The Gordon riots had menaced most dangerously the safety of the building and its occupants, and something of the same nature, though on a smaller scale, occurred during the Reform riots in 1831. Rioters



surged down the street, but were brought up short by a sentry with musket and bayonet. "Liberty or death!" was the cry that urged the mob to riot and destruction. "Liberty," said the sentry, making his musket ready for use, "I don't know much about; but if you come any further I'll show you what death is." Those in the front of the crowd decided without hesitation that a problematical liberty was the best choice for the moment.

The two previous tenants of No. 10, before Grey, had been violently opposed to Reform, so it is indeed a novelty to find No. 10 in the lists as a champion of Parliamentary reform; but this happened in the days of Earl Grey. The reactionaries fought hard, and it was only in 1832 that a Bill embodying measures of reform was eventually carried. But the victory was almost a defeat, for the Grey Ministry was compelled to resign. But nobody seemed willing to take over, so while Grey was actually in the midst of making arrangements for the removal of his furniture he was asked to remain in office.

In the autumn of this year, however, Grey had to move temporarily, for No. 10 became uninhabitable. Further drastic repairs were necessary. The Prime Minister moved to East Sheen while workmen effected the repairs, which cost in all £1247. Some years later a return of the expenses incurred in alterations, repairs and improvements to the various public buildings in Downing Street mentions the First Lord of the Treasury's "Official Residence"—though no First

Lord had then lived in the house for nineteen years. The sum expended in 1832 is the largest mentioned. Others vary considerably between £31 15s. incurred in 1835 and £384 10s. in 1837, the sum total between 1831 and 1853 being no less than £4103 3s. 9d.

Grey was the last Premier to live in No. 10 for many years and even he was anxious to leave the house. So many tenants seem to have moved in full of confidence, and yet found that in only a little while they were worrying about how soon they could get out. No. 10 Downing Street was proving too much for Grey, just as it had for others. The Cabinet found plenty of cause for dissension in the Irish Coercion Act, and matters were brought to a head by the intrigues of one Littleton, the Chief Secretary.

On July 9th, 1834, Grey took the avenue of escape offered by the discontent caused by the Littleton affair and resigned. At seventy years of age he was beyond coping with No. 10, and the load of responsibility that it housed. He had been, politically speaking, a tired man when he took over the tenancy, and in the long years out of office he had grown unused to Parliamentary striving and strife, and the fire and vitality of his younger years had abated.

When he left No. 10 he quitted politics for all time and lived in peace and comfort for the remaining eleven years of his life. Though his four years in

No. 10 had not been remarkable, they had seen the passing of the Reform Bill. Grey was by nature unassuming, but he was a great orator, and his limitations were more than excused by his unassailable honesty.

For the next forty years No. 10 Downing Street was forlornly unwanted by successive Prime Ministers. The period is particularly noticeable, for, from Lord Melbourne's appointment as First Lord of the Treasury in July, 1834, there were no fewer than fourteen changes of Ministry, and these were divided between only eight Prime Ministers.

At the beginning of this time the house was used by three successive Premiers for the accommodation of their Private Secretaries. After 1852 it does not seem to have had even the comfort of being lived in, being given up entirely to clerks and officials, with the periodic honour of a visit from His Majesty's ministers for the purpose of a Cabinet meeting.

After Grey had left, No. 10 stood empty during Melbourne's first Premiership, a matter of four months. Peel, whose ministry lasted only about the same period, moved one of the Secretaries of the Treasury, Sir Thomas Fremantle, into the historic house he himself did not wish to use.

Melbourne's second "official" tenancy of No. 10 lasted from 1835 to 1841, and during this time he had no thought of leaving his own comfortable house in Grosvenor Square for Downing Street. But he found the house convenient for the billeting of his

Private Secretaries. First, W. F. Cowper, who later became Baron Mount-Temple, shared No. 10 with G. E. Anson. But we learn from Boyle's Court Guide that in due course Cowper moved out to make room for the Hon. Mrs. Anson. The honeymoon atmosphere once more gave No. 10 a refreshing relief from dry officialdom and routine.

The second ministry of Peel, 1841 to 1846, brought a day of drama and tragedy to No. 10. The house still billeted Secretaries, one of whom was Edward Drummond, the Premier's Private Secretary. Drummond was well trusted by Peel and had been picked out when riding in Peel's coach by a madman as being Peel himself. Had the Minister been living in No. 10 at the time there is little chance that the lunatic would have made such a mistake.

However, on January 20th, 1843, when Drummond was walking home along Whitehall, the man rushed at him from behind and fired a pistol point-blank into his back. Drummond never returned to No. 10. He died five days later, the second occupant of the house to meet his end by the weapon of an assassin while discharging his normal duties.

While the unfortunate Drummond lived in No. 10 his principal companion had been another Private Secretary, W. H. Stephenson. After Drummond's death Stephenson was joined by the Private Secretary who replaced Drummond, George Arbuthnot. Both these men had to leave, on the fall of the Peel adminis-

tration, but the next Premier, Lord John Russell, carried on the new tradition by handing the house over to his Secretaries, the Hon. George Keppel (the Earl of Albemarle's son, and thus a descendant of the Albemarle on the site of part of whose lodgings No. 10 was actually built), and the Hon. Charles Grey. These two were joined by the Hon. R. W. Grey. So No. 10 was pleasantly full. The Greys were already familiar with No. 10 during the tenancy of their father. Earl Grey, incidentally, had justified his marriage by ten sons and five daughters.

When Russell left office in 1852 the house became exclusively departmental. Those who have been in an office building at night after the staff have gone home know how rooms and passages echo to their footsteps. There is something pathetic about a house deprived of occupants. Now the long nights in No. 10 were peopled only with the ghosts of those who had once filled the rooms with brilliance and gaiety. Where had stood decanters of port were bottles of ink.

The house knew little of the industrial revolution and the glories of Queen Victoria's early days. Take romance into an office and set it down in black and white, in terms of reports, warrants, minutes and profit and loss and your romance is dead. In Downing Street secretaries and clerks would bustle busily to and fro. Constantly the door of No. 10 would open and shut, now a messenger would enter with the black box of Cabinet secrets, now a civil servant,

having hung up his hat, would go out for a stroll in St. James's Park. Industry certainly, but almost devoid of the human touch.

No. 10 held no attraction as a dwelling for Lord Derby during his terms of office. Thrice Prime Minister, in 1852, between 1858 and 1859, and lastly from 1866 to 1868, he lived in his own house in St. James's Square. Argyll Street remained the residence of the Earl of Aberdeen during his term of office, 1852 to 1855, and Lord Palmerston preferred Piccadilly to No. 10 Downing Street.

In 1868 Disraeli was Prime Minister for about ten months, during which time he continued to live in 2, Whitehall Gardens. He was succeeded by Mr. Gladstone, who likewise stayed in his usual residence during his term of office, 1868 to 1874. It was only during Disraeli's second ministry that No. 10 again came into its own, and even then the Premier did not move until he had held office for nearly three years, and presumably felt that his period of office was likely to be long enough to make a move worth while.

It is interesting to speculate on the reasons which kept this succession of Prime Ministers out of residence in No. 10. The house was not even occupied by Chancellors of the Exchequer, according to the precedent of a hundred years before. One notices that the houses of all these Premiers—Whitehall Gardens, Carlton House Terrace, where Gladstone lived during his first term of office ; Piccadilly, Argyll Street, St.

James's and Grosvenor Squares, and Chesham Place, were all fairly convenient for Parliament. However, when Disraeli moved in during his second ministry, subsequent Prime Ministers, with only one exception, followed his example.

## CHAPTER IX

### GREAT VICTORIANS AT No. 10

No. 10 and the working classes—Disraeli's room—No. 10 bestows a title—Overseas expansion and the N.W. Frontier—A Downing Street pest—Gladstone in No. 10—Northcote: another unwilling tenant—W. H. Smith—No. 10 houses First Lords who are not Premiers—Balfour—No. 10's position regulated.

**M**OST people who had lived in No. 10 had left it for a seat in the House of Lords, though of recent years it had been used as the office of noble Lords and Earls. Disraeli reversed the usual order, for though he had every right to live in the house as a commoner, being, in spite of that, Prime Minister, it was not until a title had been conferred on him that No. 10 was honoured with his presence. Now the old house was the High Altar of the Conservative Party; Queen Victoria was the Goddess, Disraeli the High Priest, and a sacrifice was not far for the seeking, in the person of Mr. Gladstone. As is the case with all altars, No. 10 was first blessed by the priest and next occupied by the offering, Disraeli being Mr. Gladstone's precursor in tenancy. Indeed, from the year of Disraeli's occupation dated the Queen's animosity for Gladstone, and her trust in the former as the



White Sheep of as straggling a flock as any that accompanied the Israelites.

There were many notable features of this tenancy. The house had hitherto depended for its power on conflicting interests in the House of Commons, never really representative ; on the support of the House of Lords ; and on the backing of the Court, which, of course, was always supposed to have at heart nothing but the good of the common people. With Disraeli in its shelter the policy of No. 10 was to seek direct the support of the working classes!

During this ministry No. 10 bore a suitably spartan appearance. Its three upper windows were protected by railings eighteen inches to two feet high—presumably in case any ideals which had got so far should be in danger of falling out ! Disraeli's room was decorated comfortably, but plainly, even for the Victorian era. His desk, not a large one, was placed on a line with the conventional marble mantelpiece, and on a plain top it carried one of those old-fashioned racks composed of a set of brass rails. Before the desk was an elegant swivel chair, and opposite, in a further corner of the room, a chintz-covered couch. A comfortable lean-back tapestry arm-chair occupied the centre of the room. On the desk were two wicker letter baskets, usually full to overflowing. Doubtless these baskets held stacks of congratulatory messages in May, 1878, the time of the peak of their owner's popularity. No. 10 had been disturbed by the Russo-Turkish troubles, and had despatched Disraeli and

Lord Salisbury to Berlin as plenipotentiaries to discuss the situation. Britain's chief desire was to prevent Russia from gaining access to the Mediterranean, and this her envoys succeeded in doing. The return to Downing Street, bringing "peace with honour," was in the nature of a triumph.

On the mantelpiece were four candles in case the illumination from the gas-brackets on either side of the desk should fail. Altogether, the room was an ideal study for a Prime Minister, but to modern eyes it would seem incomplete because it had no telephone.

No. 10 was then working more closely in concert with the Crown than at any other time, with the possible exception of Lord North's tenancy. It is said that Disraeli told Her Majesty that she could occupy the same position in the government of Great Britain as had Queen Elizabeth, and certainly it was on the suggestion and express advice of her Prime Minister that Victoria took the style of "Empress of India." It is an amusing situation to find No. 10 conferring a title on the Ruler of the land.

Disraeli seems to have favoured at this time a kind of "constitutional autocracy." But in fairness to the great Prime Minister it must be said that he regarded an influential Crown as a wholesome deterrent to the possible over-reaching pride of some future occupant of No. 10. He argued that reasonable influence and authority vested in the Crown would serve to restrain any tenant of the house from vesting himself with the powers of a dictator. Disraeli was a wise

man and thoroughly appreciated the perils of dictatorship, perils which the "man in the street" now thoroughly understands.

Constitutional as Disraeli's views of the government of Britain may have been, they underwent considerable change when Overseas possessions were involved. Then No. 10 looked after "No. 1," first, second, and all the time. At this juncture the control of passes in the Afghan country was essential to the complete security of British rights in India, and it cannot be denied that in the process of obtaining this security a good deal of territory was acquired to which we had no shadow of claim.

However, on February 13th, 1879, Disraeli was able to announce that we had secured the North-West Frontier—the lock that would "render our Indian Empire inviolable," and that thus we had "secured the object for which the Expedition was undertaken." But the operations had been expensive, costing over £8,000,000, apart from a yearly subsidy of £60,000 paid to the Amir.

Private life in Downing Street at this time was diversely taken up. Disraeli enjoyed the pleasure of others, but more as a spectator than as a participant. When a party was given in No. 10 its tenant would encourage everyone to enjoy themselves, but would himself take little part in the festivities, watching, and yet abstracted, as though his thoughts were still employed with schemes of Empire. Again, much of his spare time must have been taken up with the

writing of his last book—*Endymion*. This work was not as good as some of his earlier books. No doubt the cares of No. 10 made imaginative writing a difficult task.

An amusing incident occurring at this time illustrates how the very popularity of the occupant of No. 10 caused him much personal annoyance. One Tracy Turnerelli made urgent representations to Disraeli for a meeting. He had collected a "People's Tribute," he said, of 52,000 pennies. With this he had purchased a golden wreath, for presentation to the great Prime Minister.

Anxious as Mr. Turnerelli was to do honour to his hero, he felt that No. 10 itself was the only proper place for this presentation, which should be official, attended by the Press, and contain some recognition of his own "services to his country." Repeatedly he wrote to Downing Street. Naturally his requests met with polite refusals, though Tracy even said that all the reward he wished was the honour of shaking Disraeli by the hand. This wish was granted unexpectedly, for passing along Bond Street one day he suddenly came face to face with Disraeli. He at once introduced himself as the "unfortunate Tracy Turnerelli."

Disraeli shook him warmly by the hand, saying: "You have now got what you desired" and passed on. Tracy's disappointment was pathetic. Certainly he had had his handshake, but not in No. 10 Downing Street, with properly prepared speeches and crowds of

reporters ; not even in the Crystal Palace, where the golden wreath was on exhibition ; and anything less than proper public recognition he regarded as a slight upon himself. The wreath never came to No. 10. Eventually it found a home in Madame Tussaud's.

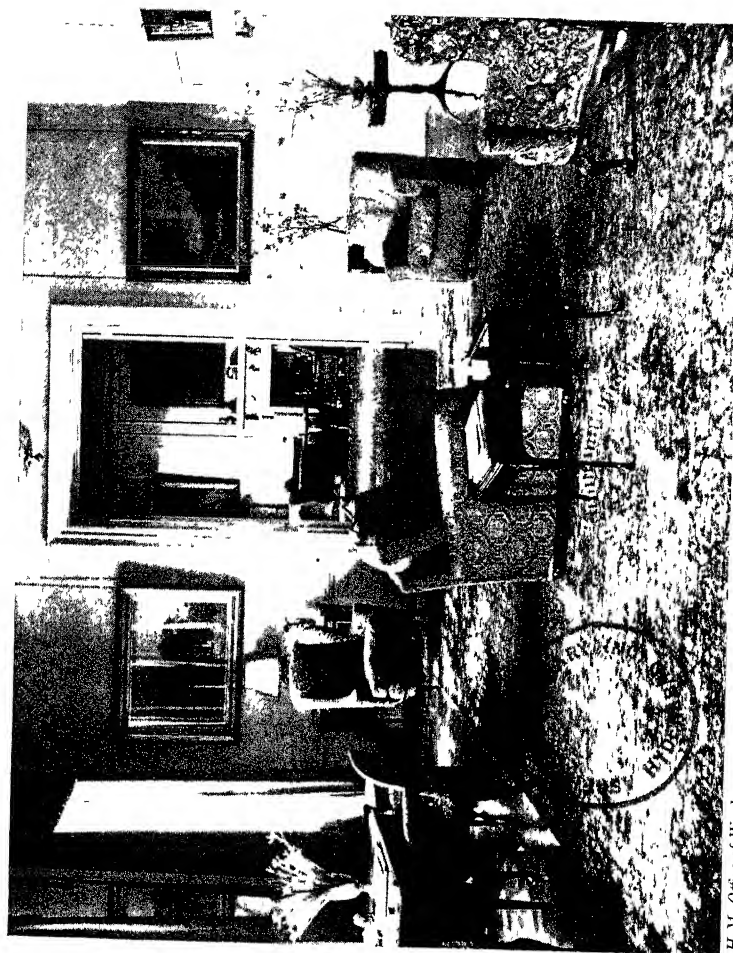
In March, 1880, the political situation seemed sound enough to risk a General Election. The returns at Liverpool on February 6th and at Southwark on the 14th had shown Conservative majorities of 2,223 and 853 respectively. No. 10 decided upon an appeal to the country. Accordingly Parliament was dissolved. In the resulting elections, however, the Conservative Party lost one hundred and eleven seats. Only one course was open—Disraeli resigned, and the new tenant, William Ewart Gladstone, assumed possession of No. 10, with the support of a tremendous majority.

On his first Premiership, as we have seen, Gladstone did not occupy the house at all. During his present and second term of office, from 1880 to 1885, it is not absolutely clear how much of the time he himself was in the house, and how far he lent it to other members of his family. Boyle, for instance, says that between 1881 and 1883 W. E. G. lived at No. 12, and that during 1882 and 1883 Herbert Gladstone, his son, was at No. 10. But previously Mr. Gladstone had been living at 73 Harley Street, and there is no reasonable doubt that he moved into Downing Street in 1880. Apparently he used No. 11 for his Private

Secretaries, and it is safe to presume that Nos. 10, 11, and 12 were combined as private residences and offices.

The official room of the Prime Minister was little changed in appearance from the time of its late occupant. The desk that has already been described in the time of Disraeli's tenancy was still in the same position. The couch at the other end of the room had not been moved, though it no longer boasted its chintz cover. Additions to the previous furniture were a round table with a heavy fringed cloth, placed in the centre of the room, and a grand piano in the corner by the door, a concession, in this official atmosphere, to Mr. Gladstone's love of music.

This room is the one in the corner, overlooking the Horse Guards and St. James's Park, and directly over the Cabinet Room. It was here that the celebrated Mrs. O'Shea—as Viscount Gladstone tells us in *Thirty Years After*—had interviews with Mr. Gladstone on August 29th and September 14th, 1882. It seems beyond doubt that these were definitely the only times on which Mrs. O'Shea visited the house, though she has mistakenly given the impression that, in the capacity of intermediary between Parnell and No. 10, she was a constant visitor, so privileged as almost to be *persona grata* at the house. She describes Gladstone walking up and down the room arm-in-arm with herself; somewhat unlikely in any case, but the more improbable on account of the round table which, as



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already mentioned, stood in the centre of the room. Further, normally during interviews Mr. Gladstone remained seated.

May 6th, 1882, was a tragic day for No. 10. Gladstone had been entertained at the Austrian Embassy to dinner. When he returned home he was met in the hall by his Secretary, and by the look of concern on the latter's face he knew that something serious had happened. The Phoenix Park murders had taken place, and, of the two men brutally done to death, one was a family connection of the Gladstones. Lord Frederick Cavendish, newly appointed Irish Secretary, was married to Mrs. Gladstone's niece. Gladstone was much moved by this sad event, as, indeed, he always was when he heard of other people's suffering.

An interesting personal detail concerning this great tenant of No. 10 is that his name should properly have been Gladstones, the name under which his father was born, but changed to Gladstone by Royal Letters Patent in 1835. Why the "s" was dropped is a mystery, for there seems little to choose between the old name and the new.

No. 10, throughout Mr. Gladstone's three stays, was in disfavour at Court, but found nothing new or alarming in that. It was the home of an idealist, a political giant. Gladstone's career is too well known to make a discussion of those parts of it during which he occupied No. 10 of much practical value, but one or two smaller points in which the policy of No. 10 in

his times has influenced our modern Britain are particularly interesting.

Every thirsty working-man who calls for a pint of bitter knows that a large part of the money he pays for it goes to the Exchequer—but few realise that it was in No. 10 that the system of taxing beer, with which we are familiar, originated. It seems singularly inapposite that this tax on Britain's national beverage should come from a house built on the site of a brewery.

This piece of irony originated in 1880, when Gladstone replaced the malt tax by a duty on beer. He can hardly have foreseen that this charge would grow to such proportions as it assumed in fifty years' time. This tax, as it grew heavier, had the natural effect of lowering the quality of the beer, and this would not have appealed to a man who, though deeply religious, wrote : " I am for old customs and traditions, against needless change. I am for the individual as against the State."

In 1885 Gladstone was succeeded in No. 10 by the new First Lord of the Treasury, Sir Stafford Northcote. Again we have an unwilling tenant, and this is hardly surprising considering the circumstances in which he took office. During his tenancy No. 10 was placed in an equivocal position, which it was to occupy while Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister, for the new Premier wished to depart from precedent in an important respect. The Prime Minister has always been the connecting link between the people, the

Government and the Sovereign. Until the time of Lord Salisbury the leader of the administration had always been First Lord of the Treasury. Now came a Premier who, having no desire to occupy No. 10, wished Northcote to lead the House of Commons and be First Lord of the Treasury, while he himself, though Prime Minister, would take the Foreign Office. This idea did not appeal to Northcote, as is admirably shown in his diary :

“Salisbury’s present idea is that I should take the post of the First Lord of the Treasury and lead the Commons, with F. Stanley for my Chancellor of the Exchequer. I have offered either to do this or go to the upper House, taking the India Office. I have offered to do whatever he thinks best. I have not much heart in the matter. This is apparently my last night in the House of Commons. I have sat in it rather more than thirty years, and it has become part of my life.”

As First Lord of the Treasury, Northcote had a right to insist that everything which went on in all branches of the administration should be known to himself. So again in his diary he remarks :

“The point on which it will be necessary for me to insist is that I should see all the Foreign Office despatches as if I were Prime Minister, otherwise we may be exposed to serious trouble.”

In a memorandum to Lord Salisbury he stated his case. He pointed out that to have a First Lord in No. 10 who was not also Prime Minister, was a complete novelty, and that no precedent existed to define the duties and functions of Premier and First Lord when these were separated. He required that a clearly defined frontier should be established.

In attempting to arrive at some definite understanding upon the matter of where No. 10's duties began and left off he put two main points to Lord Salisbury. Was the First Lord to be in direct personal communication with the Sovereign, and was he to be entitled to see all the Foreign Office despatches, as the Prime Minister is, under the settlement of 1851? He further queried what appointments would be at No. 10's disposal, but said that he was not unduly worried about this, as the personnel of the Treasury and offices connected with it could be settled later. It was finally decided that Northcote's appointment in No. 10 should coincide with his entry into the House of Lords as Earl of Iddesleigh and Viscount St. Cyres.

The new First Lord of the Treasury entered No. 10 on June 25th, and he describes meeting the tenant he was displacing half-way up the stairs. The two men had a pleasant conversation, at the end of which Gladstone presented his successor with three books on Homer, than which no more apt present could have been given, as Northcote had always been a great lover of books. Soon after he was installed in No. 10 the Earl of Iddesleigh, with his wife, paid a

visit to his own county. His reception was amazing. Flags were flown and bands played. The station was decorated and the welcome was begun by a salute of fog-signals as the train steamed into the platform.

One feature of Iddesleigh's tenancy of No. 10 caused considerable embarrassment. Its tenant was found to have a double. It was reported, and confirmed in several quarters, that Iddesleigh was going about with his arm in a sling, when actually he had received no hurt. This led to the discovery that the person of No. 10's tenant was duplicated in a solicitor.

No. 10 next received Mr. Gladstone again, and, in the subsequent Salisbury Ministry, it once more had a First Lord in occupation who was not Prime Minister, in the person of W. H. Smith. It was during this period—to be exact on January 11th, 1887—that the house witnessed the tragic termination of the career of its recent occupant, Lord Iddesleigh.

Iddesleigh was visiting No. 10 to see Lord Salisbury, who, though he did not occupy the house, retained the official room of the Prime Minister. Iddesleigh had been a sufferer from heart trouble throughout the latter years of his life. Even in his youth he had been delicate. On reaching the ante-room at the top of the stairs he collapsed in a chair, there to be discovered presently by Lord Walter Gordon-Lennox and Mr. Henry Manners. Another version of the story says that he was actually taken ill in the presence of Henry Manners, who caught him as he staggered. These accounts differ only in trifles, and there is no

doubt about the fact that he was laid on the couch at the end of the Prime Minister's study, where he died, without speaking, in about twenty minutes to half an hour.

The tenant of the house at this time, W. H. Smith, had risen by means of sheer hard work and determination from the position of junior partner in his father's firm of newsagents and booksellers. It was due to his ability that the firm of W. H. Smith and Sons attained the vast proportions which had brought him so much commercial reward, and this stood him in good stead when he entered politics. He was one of the few occupants of No. 10 who refused honours, though after his death at Walmer Castle—which he occupied as Warden of the Cinque Ports—his widow was created Viscountess Hambleden in her own right. It has been rare for No. 10 to fall vacant through the death of its tenant and this is one of the few instances.

The new tenant and First Lord was Arthur James Balfour, who occupied the house during the winter of 1891 and the early half of 1892. Many of No. 10's tenants have been sick men—Grenville, with his bones "carious and quite worn away"; Pitt, during his last tenancy; Iddesleigh's heart disease; and the insomnia of practically every tenant.

Balfour's constitution was not of the best and caused him to be naturally lackadaisical, though at times he would have bursts of vigour and energy. Lord Salisbury was still Prime Minister, and he was

the uncle of No. 10's new tenant and had been his political mentor. Balfour's tenancy was not of long duration. He was succeeded by Mr. Gladstone in August, 1892. This was the fine old man's last stay.

After Gladstone came the Earl of Rosebery, who turned No. 10 again into an office, for, apart from the Prime Minister's official study, the only room which Rosebery inhabited was a bedroom of which he made occasional use. During nearly all his period of office Rosebery lived at 38 Berkeley Square, and only towards the end of his tenancy did he use No. 10, while his own house was under repair.

During Rosebery's occupation it is probable that the staff of the house spent a considerable part of their time studying the racing news. Archibald Philip Primrose, 5th Earl of Rosebery, had already been sent down from "The House" rather than give up the small racing-stud that he was keeping. Indeed, racing was far more in his line than the Premiership. In one of his letters he wrote: "I am very homesick for the Foreign Office, and I do not think I shall like any of the duties of my new position—patronage is odious."

During Rosebery's ministry No. 10 was in good favour at Court, apart from a minor clash with the Queen in its early days. Rosebery would sometimes write from No. 10 long memoranda to Victoria, who more than once took him to task for levity in speeches delivered outside the House. He possessed an ample sense of humour, but insomnia, from which he suffered

badly, caused him to be testy after a bad night. On June 6th he won the Derby with "Ladas," and the rejoicing at No. 10 was in striking contrast to its official atmosphere. Probably the news that he was to occupy No. 10 Downing Street had caused Lord Rosebery less enthusiasm than the victory on the turf.

Much to the fore at this time was a man who was later to be a tenant at No. 10. Campbell-Bannerman had held the office of Secretary of State for War during Gladstone's last tenancy of the house, and he retained that office when Lord Rosebery moved in. It was an attack on C.-B. which caused the fall of this ministry. In the Commons one day John Brodrick (later Viscount Midleton and Secretary for War) proposed a reduction of C.-B.'s salary on the grounds that the reserve supplies of ammunition were insufficient.

Bannerman admitted that the country did not hold more than one hundred million rounds in reserve. Actually this was quite as much as it was any good to hold, as cordite, which was then still in a somewhat experimental stage, did not keep well. Unfortunately, at the time there was a poor attendance at the House and the Government were defeated by a majority of seven. Rosebery at once, without much reluctance, resigned.

No. 10's next tenant brought the house a greater taste of family life. Arthur Balfour moved in with his brother-in-law, Lord Rayleigh, and his wife. Some say that only popular men receive nicknames. In that case Balfour must have been most popular, for



he was given three at different periods in his life. All No. 10's tenants have been variously described in honeyed terms by their friends and more than unflatteringly by their adversaries.

The Duke of Portland always leaps to one's mind, unhappily, as the Toad-Eater. W. H. Smith was nicknamed "Old Morality"; Rosebery was dubbed "Gaudy" by his Oxford contemporaries. Arthur James Balfour in earlier days was called "Fanny" on account of his preciousness, but the name which finally stuck to him at the time when he succeeded "Gaudy" in office was "Prince Arthur."

Again, this time for nearly seven years, No. 10 was in the unsatisfactory position of housing a First Lord of the Treasury who was not also Prime Minister. During the last three years of Balfour's stay the position changed, for he took over the Premiership on his uncle's resignation. In all, he occupied No. 10 for ten years. This period is notable for the conclusion of the Boer War and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and death. Before the end of the war Balfour had to take over the Foreign Office, in addition to the usual duties of No. 10, for Lord Salisbury's weakening health made the conduct of affairs too much for him—he was then over seventy years of age.

During this time No. 10 was again subjected to fierce opposition. Its prestige was admirably upheld by Balfour, who did not for a moment lose his head, and the calm and equanimity with which he met all

attacks was of the greatest possible help to the stability of the Government and the country.

Strangely enough, even though No. 10 had been the residence of First Lords of the Treasury since 1735 and these First Lords, with the exception of the Salisbury administrations, had also been the Prime Ministers of Britain, no Prime Minister, up to and including Balfour, had any official position as such, nor was his title officially recognised. It will be remembered that Lord North had said that the post of Prime Minister was foreign to our country's constitution. Balfour, however, decided that this absurd situation should be remedied. He prepared measures which were put into effect during Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's tenancy. Thus at last No. 10 housed an officially recognised Prime Minister, having, by Royal Warrant, his proper place of precedence in State ceremonies, fourth among the subjects of the King, after the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Lord Chancellor.

## CHAPTER X

### MODERN TIMES

“C.-B.”—Powers of Lords’ Veto curtailed—Asquith—Old Age Pensions—Empire progress—Suffragettes—War clouds—Lichnowsky weeps in No. 10—12 midnight, August 4th—Cuckoo in Downing Street nest—No. 10’s garden city—Dictatorship—The “Dole”—Decline and fall of L.L. G.—Bonar Law and the Depression.

THE year 1905 marked the beginning of a new period in the history of No. 10 Downing Street. Uninterruptedly since then the house has been tenanted by the Prime Ministers, at last officially recognised as such. Then the Premiership and the Cabinet system were finally established in the forms with which we are to-day familiar. Many abuses had been swept away which, in the early years, had brought discredit upon the house. Never again could No. 10 be the home of sinecures, and Campbell-Bannerman, who took up his tenancy in December, 1905, revived Gladstone’s ruling that members of the Cabinet must resign any public directorships on accepting office.

No. 10 was now the home of an advanced Liberal, a man who saw the advantages to be had from inviting the assistance of leaders of other views, to help in the task of governing the country. Thus the Cabinet was a representative one. Mr. Asquith was Chancellor

of the Exchequer. A policy of free trade and retrenchment was pursued. The tenant of No. 10 endeavoured to persuade other nations to agree to resort to arbitration in international dispute; but this foreshadowing of the League of Nations met with failure. The armaments race continued. Negotiations for the protection of peace were abruptly brought to an end by the German Chancellor, Prince von Bülow, in his announcement that Germany was not willing even to discuss the arrest of armaments.

It is natural that most of No. 10's tenants should have been elderly men. The most notable exception to the rule was William Pitt. Bannerman reached his seventieth year while in occupation of the house. In him No. 10 again had a tenant whose health was liable to break down. Bannerman knew that a heart attack might overcome him at any time. But more than his own weakness, the illness of his wife was a continual strain on the Prime Minister. She died in Marienbad in 1906, and from then on Bannerman was a changed man.

At this time No. 10 found the House of Lords obstructive in the extreme. The Education Bill was altered out of recognition and then sent back to the Commons, "reconstituted." When this procedure became common No. 10 faced a difficult situation. Much work might be done in preparation of a measure, and then virtually set at naught by a veto from the Lords.

Campbell-Bannerman had refused a peerage, and

he did not propose to let the Lords throw out measures in which No. 10 represented the will of the people. He became "Father of the Commons" on May 22nd, 1907, and slightly more than a month later he carried a motion to restrict the Lords' veto. The principal clause in this motion stated, "Within the limits of a single parliament, the final decision of the Commons shall prevail."

Illness deprived No. 10 of its tenant later in the year. He spent two months in Biarritz, then extremely fashionable because of the frequent visits of King Edward. It is a pity that no picture of Campbell-Bannerman is hung in No. 10 Downing Street. Three, indeed, were painted during his stay in the house, but one is now in the National Portrait Gallery at Edinburgh and the others are in clubs—the Reform and the National Liberal. He was one of the most charming characters that have ever occupied the house. He met reverses and illness alike, with good humour and an unruffled temper. His successor in the house admirably described him: "The least cynical of mankind, but no one had a keener eye for the humours and ironies of the political situation." In No. 10 he prepared his speeches with care, and he would take with him to the House the exhaustive notes he had written in the quietness and privacy of his study. One of the most notable features of his tenancy was his support of Women's Suffrage. His constant and unrelenting struggle against the autocracy of the House of Lords finally ended in the

Parliament Act of 1911—an excellent monument to his work in No. 10.

Early 1908 again found No. 10 Downing Street a house of sickness. Campbell-Bannerman had caught influenza. On March 4th His Majesty called at No. 10 to see him, and impressed on him, since he proposed paying a visit to Biarritz, that he hoped the Premier, sick though he was, would not send in his resignation for six weeks, by which time he would have returned. Campbell-Bannerman was then still hoping to recover, but a month later he knew that he was dying, and resigned. On April 22nd he died of heart failure.

There had never been any question as to who would be No. 10's next tenant. For several weeks before Campbell-Bannerman's retirement and death Mr. Asquith had had to take over most of the Prime Minister's duties. He wrote to his wife on the same day that the King had been to see the Premier in his sick-bed. The letter is headed from 10 Downing Street, and describes "a pleasant interview with the King after the Privy Council" of the day before: "He said that he had quite made up his mind to send for me at once, in the event of anything happening to C-B . . . we must provide for the future. . . . Altogether it was quite a satisfactory interview."<sup>1</sup>

One notable feature of Asquith's tenancy was the Prime Minister's lack of personal animosity towards

<sup>1</sup> From *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith. Hutchinson, 1932.

Opposition leaders. In many cases No. 10 has brought upon its tenants the personal hatred and venom of its political adversaries. Because of this tendency Campbell-Bannerman had not approved of any personal friendships between the tenants of No. 10 and the leading lights of the Opposition. But Mr. Asquith, on the other hand, did not see why, however strongly one might disapprove of an adversary's political opinions, it should not be possible to be friendly with him—outside the political arena.

Mr. Asquith came to No. 10 via the Bar, and this fact may to a certain extent account for his point of view ; but it was novel to most people at that time, and involved No. 10 in much criticism. The advisability of occasionally burying the political hatchet was not generally realised until the days of the Great War. The Coalition Governments, and more recently the National Government, have shown just how much can be done when No. 10 has the help, instead of the hindrance, of those who normally would be its enemies.

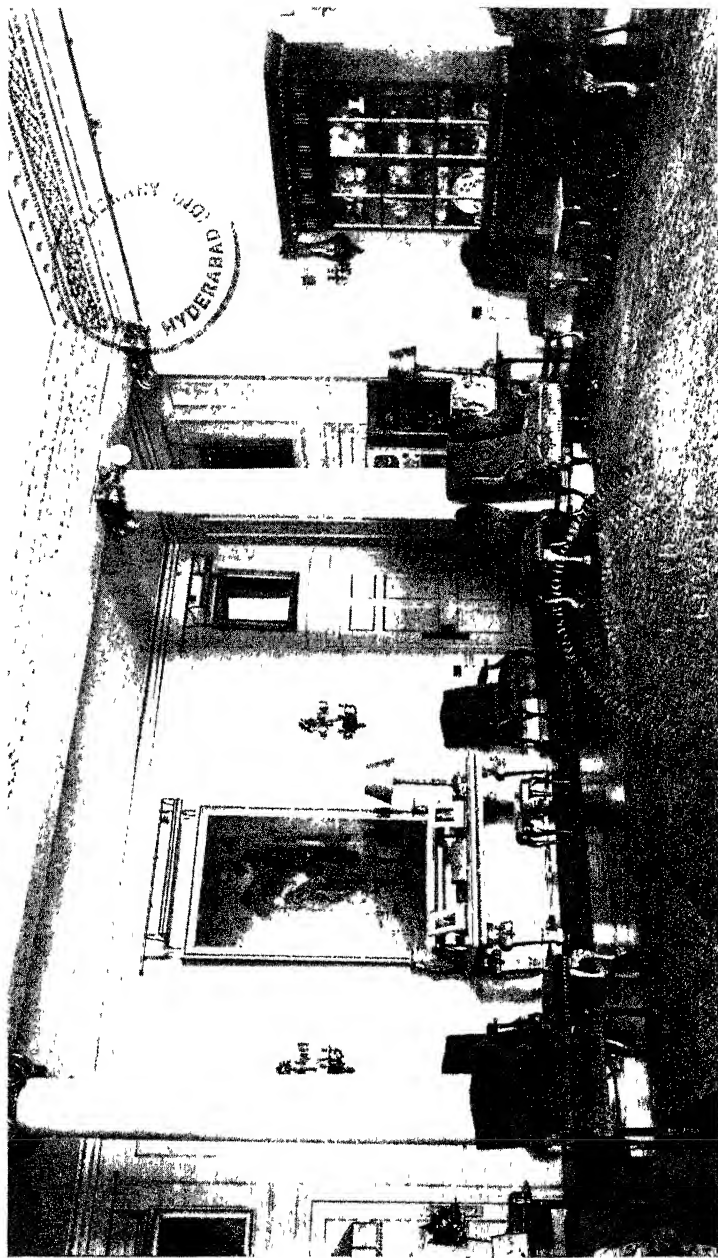
However, whatever policy No. 10 favoured at any time in its history, there have always been those who have regarded it as not going far enough, and those who have regarded it as going too far. Just as a house will be too large for one tenant and too small for the next, so No. 10 has always had trouble in pleasing everybody. The Old Age Pensions Bill of 1908, which gave 5s. a week to those of seventy years of age, or more, with private incomes not exceeding 8s.

a week, was regarded by the Labour members as mean, and by the House of Lords as prodigal extravagance. The Bill was one of the achievements most dear to Mr. Asquith's heart, and it was Downing Street's first step towards dealing with the distress and misery of the poor.

In 1908 and 1909 respectively No. 10 produced the Morley-Minto reforms in India, and established the Union of South Africa. There is an essential difference between these two pieces of legislature ; the first included Indians in the Governor-General's Council, and the second excluded natives from the Senate of the Union. Asquith reluctantly opposed a proposal to include natives in the Constitution of South Africa because he feared that if he did not do so the whole Bill might be wrecked.

The Parliament Act of 1911 was finally brought to fruition during this tenancy. In this Act No. 10 reconciled the three greatest factors in government : the will of the people, the deliberations of the Commons, and the prerogative of the Crown. At this time it was the policy of the Lords to avoid crossing the will of organised Labour, but they made themselves as obstructive as possible. The rejection of the Budget of 1909 *in toto* by the Lords was an event without precedent in the history of No. 10. Inside and outside the country trouble brewed. Germany showed her teeth over the annexation by Austria of Bosnia-Herzegovina. War clouds gathered. The year 1911 was disturbed by railway and coal strikes.





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THE DRAWING-ROOM

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Of all who have lived in No. 10 Asquith was amongst the least troubled by illness. For medical science he had little respect, and a doctor would have been as welcome at the door of No. 10 as if it had been the home of Christian Science. Away from Downing Street, he amused himself with golf, which he played indifferently, but with enjoyment. In No. 10 itself his recreations were chess and, occasionally, bridge. Chess was his favourite indoor game ; at bridge he was one of those players (detested by the expert) who overcall their hands for the sheer joy of a gamble, and will put themselves and their partners in impossible positions, for the fun of playing the hand.

Unlike several of the previous tenants of No. 10, notably Gladstone, Asquith derived no pleasure at all from music. He seems, indeed, to have had little patience or indulgence for the trivialities and simplicities which make up much of the existences of ordinary men. Golf was a concession, and perhaps, his reading, which was as avid and as eclectic as that of any schoolboy. One particularly striking characteristic of his tenancy was that he kept No. 10, the office, separate from No. 10, the private house. Once the business of the office was over for the day, No. 10 would hear no more politics from its tenant, and where, since morning, it had been accustomed to sober and well-considered utterances, it was diverted by extravagances of expression and exaggeration on quite another plane.

At this time much anxiety was caused by the Irish Question, and also by the Suffragettes, one of whose favourite tricks was, it will be remembered, to chain themselves to the railings of No. 10, or Buckingham Palace, and vociferously demand recognition of their rights. The tenant of the time strongly disapproved of women's suffrage, and accordingly the women of Britain had no love for No. 10.

In July, 1912, an ugly incident happened which might have robbed the house of its tenant. During a torchlight procession in their honour in Dublin Mr. and Mrs. Asquith were riding with Mr. Redmond in an open carriage, when suddenly a suffragette burst from the crowd and flung a scythe into their midst. It was indeed lucky that the only injury sustained by any of the party was a cut in the ear by Mr. Redmond. Troubles piled high on No. 10, particularly on the occasion when the Army were asked whether they would be prepared to fight in the event of civil war in Ireland. Early in 1914 Mr. Asquith increased his duties and responsibilities by taking over the War Office.

Of the opening stages of the War, and the rumours and counter-rumours which came to No. 10 Downing Street much has already been written. The Imperial Conference of 1909 and the Committee of Imperial Defence had assured No. 10 of the support of the Dominions without endless negotiations in the event of war. England was not completely unprepared for war, for in 1913 the Naval Estimates had been greatly

enlarged. Writing to the King from No. 10 at the end of July, 1914, Asquith mentioned that the situation between Austria and Serbia, following the assassination at Serajevo, might be solved by Grey's proposal to Lichnowsky that Britain should co-operate with France, Italy and Germany in mediating between the two powers.

On August 1st a message was delivered from Berlin that the Tsar had ordered general mobilisation. The only chance of averting the obviously dangerous consequences of this move was in a personal appeal from King George to the Tsar. Asquith at once set to work preparing the form in which this appeal should be made, and it was after one o'clock in the morning that this difficult task was completed. Immediately, he drove to Buckingham Palace and had the unusual experience of an interview with the King clothed in a dressing-gown.

It is doubtful whether there was much sleep in No. 10 that night. At breakfast-time there arrived a distracted visitor—Prince Lichnowsky. The Prince, with tears in his eyes, begged Asquith to prevent Britain intervening in aid of France when war broke out. The night of August 4th was one of the most dramatic in the history of No. 10.

In the Cabinet Room sat Mr. Asquith, his wife, Mr. Churchill, Sir William Tyrell and Sir Edward Grey. The ultimatum which had been sent to Germany expired at midnight, and though there was no reasonable likelihood of a reply, the form of waiting

had to be gone through. What can have been the thoughts of those people, as they sat waiting only for the passing of the minutes till Britain should be plunged into war? There is one thing certain, that all who were there looked upon the prospect with the greatest dread and aversion. Twelve o'clock came, and Mr. Churchill hastened to set the wires humming which should acquaint our Fleet that Britain was at war.

Those disastrous war years represent the worst period No. 10 has ever passed through. It was severally tenanted during the war by Asquith and Lloyd George, but not for one moment did its activities lessen throughout the struggle, though the pressure of work and responsibility was colossal. During Asquith's tenancy there were unremitting demands on the Treasury for money, and more money. Asquith had passed the War Office to Kitchener soon after the outbreak of hostilities. But this move had done little to lessen his labour, and he would often still be hard at work in the Cabinet Room until two or three o'clock in the morning.

One may well wonder how he stood the strain, in spite of his remarkable constitution. Certainly his capacity for divorcing No. 10—the office—from No. 10—the private house—stood him in good stead, and no matter how late he worked he always sat up for an hour or so reading some book quite unconnected with his daily work. Thus he always went to bed with a good chance of enjoying an even and untroubled sleep.

On the formation of the Coalition Government early in 1915 No. 10 lost some of its oldest and most loyal friends. One of these, Haldane, Asquith was most distressed to lose. Next year came a heavy blow, the death of Kitchener. Lord Kitchener's place in the War Office was taken by Lloyd George. In 1916, No. 10 shared in the common bereavements by the death of Raymond Asquith.

At this time the house was attacked by the Press. It is not unremarkable that during this tenancy No. 10 kept aloof from the Press altogether and forebore from denying or approving any of its statements. This policy is in notable contrast to that of the next tenant, who kept the newspapers severely in line, and used them for administrative propaganda. A great change in the newspaper world had come about since No. 10 first housed a Prime Minister. In the early days newspapers were displacing pamphlets and lampoons as media of political attack and defence. When the war came, it had been learned that Public Opinion is a powerful force. Newspaper proprietors realised this fact, and with the war came their opportunity. The tremendous power over public opinion that a great newspaper wields would be subject to grave misuse were it not for the salutary effect of competition, which makes for a balance of power in the newspaper world very similar to that maintained in Parliament.

No. 10 had one unrestrainedly disruptive person among its ministers. Lloyd George was the cuckoo in the Downing Street nest, and the first person whom

he desired to go overboard, we may suppose, was Mr. Asquith. Actually Lloyd George expressed himself anxious that No. 10 should retain the nominal leadership, but his terms, and the terms of his proposition for a new War Council, in effect negated No. 10's full authority and supremacy.

No. 10 saw the break-up of the Ministry on December 5th, 1916, when the Liberals in the Ministry stood out against Lloyd George's ideas, and when, in the afternoon of the same day, Chamberlain, Curzon and Cecil visited the house and showed that, should he stand out against Lloyd George, its tenant could not count on their support.

That same evening Asquith was called away from the dinner-table in No. 10 to see Bonar Law, who had been asked by the King to attempt to form a Ministry, and who first of all desired to know if he could rely on Asquith's active support. This he found he could not do, and in the end it was Lloyd George who became the next tenant of the historic house in Downing Street. Then there were remarkable innovations in No. 10, innovations such as it had never before known. Among these stands out the newspaper "ballyhoo" which attended every move on the part of No. 10. Again, No. 10 had never in its life before been such a warren of officials. Officials who, indeed, popped in and out like rabbits, often with little more apparent purpose.

No. 10 might indeed at this time be described as being built of newspaper. Its tenant had the greatest



possible faith, a faith above all other faiths except that in himself, in the value to a Prime Minister of publicity. No matter how much publicity, the more the better. Even transatlantic flyers have never had as much publicity, and where theirs lasts only a few weeks at most, Lloyd George's lasted years. It could be said that he let No. 10, and his security there, stand by the Press alone.

All glory for any success now came to No. 10, and No. 10 was unsparing in its criticism of failure, for which the blame must always be laid elsewhere. After the war the Press accorded the Prime Minister publicity which made his progress in the nature of a triumphal procession, which any Roman General would have looked on with amazement and envy.

During this tenancy vast projects would be born in No. 10, sometimes to dwindle, as a tadpole does from head to tail, and no one ever knew what No. 10 would next hatch. The "Garden City," of which No. 10 was the metropolis, had its suburbs in St. James's Park, where the rows of huts are still a familiar memory to most of us.

The population of the departments attached to No. 10 Downing Street grew daily, from Lloyd George's installation in the house, and every now and then a new department would be created. The growth of No. 10's adjuncts at that time is only comparable to the way in which many towns, since the war, have flung out street upon street of jerry-built houses around and about them. The

secretariat in No. 10, mainly accommodated in huts in the garden itself, amounted to no fewer than one hundred and fourteen people, and it was deemed necessary to have as many as fourteen charwomen, quite apart from the domestic servants, to clear up the mess.

That this should destroy much of the secret nature of proceedings both inside and outside the Cabinet Room in No. 10 Downing Street was inevitable. With the birth of the Cabinet system in the early days of No. 10's official existence it had gained much prestige through the very secrecy which attended its proceedings.

Fleet Street remained loyal to No. 10 during 1916 and 1917 and did more than any other force could have to cover up mistakes and failures, and bring all credit, wherever due, to the door of No. 10, dressed up in the most glittering words. By 1919, however, Northcliffe and Lloyd George were no longer teaming together. Sir Charles Mallet comments on this and similar cases: "So many eminent men of all parties who have tried to work closely with Lloyd George have sooner or later lost faith in him."<sup>1</sup>

Whatever our grandsons may say of the part played by No. 10 in the war years—and in the subsequent Irish troubles—historians can hardly deny that during this time No. 10 attempted, and in many cases succeeded, in imposing an almost dictatorial rule on the conduct of politics, war, and its own affairs. The

constitutional functions of Premiership and of government were set aside in fact if not in words. The scale of expenditure encouraged by No. 10 was unparalleled in its history. No. 10 had put out more offshoots than the most prolific of trees, and the Geddes Axe was a very necessary means of pruning this Downing Street almost obscured by branches. Even most of those civil servants who suffered under the cuts must realise, if they study the history of our times at all, that had Downing Street been permitted to continue with a full complement of such satellites they themselves in the end would have been paying the greater part of their salaries in direct and indirect taxation—with the rest of the country in poverty. However, No. 10 produced one great benefit at this period—the system of Unemployment Insurance.

No. 10 blowing its own trumpet was rather a pathetic sight, particularly when the trumpet broke towards the end of this tenancy. By 1922 No. 10 had been deserted both by its Conservative supporters and by Fleet Street, and Lloyd George—the Barnum of Downing Street—ended his tenancy and his term of power.

Andrew Bonar Law was the next of No. 10's tenants, and he, like so many others who had lived in the house, was in ill-health during the whole of his ministry. In this tenant No. 10 went back once more to the old brigade, for he was sixty-four years old when he moved into the house. No. 10 was now the stronghold of the Conservative Party, the Cabinet was

entirely Conservative, and that party in the recent General Elections had gained a majority of seventy-four seats over the combined total of those held by other parties in the House.

After the comparatively long tenancies of No. 10 during recent years its occupation by Bonar Law seems of particularly short duration. He was in the house only a little over six months. He resigned on May 20th, 1923, and, within a year from the time of his first occupation of the house, was dead. The next tenant of No. 10 and also his successor, in company with King Edward, were pall-bearers at his funeral.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE WOMEN OF DOWNING STREET

“Backstairs influence”—Elizabeth of the “Peacock”—Lady Knyvett, a house-proud woman—Mrs. Downing and Charlotte Lichfield, a contrast in characters—Woman’s cares in No. 10—Mrs. Dowdeswell, a good manager—Moving-in troubles and anxieties—Background and foreground women.

THE far-reaching effects of the “backstairs influence” of women in British politics were once discussed at all fashionable gatherings. To-day one is still led to wonder to what extent the many important decisions that have been made within the walls of No. 10 have been influenced by the women who have lived in it.

Probably most of the repairs to No. 10 were instigated by women, and it is likely that No. 10 owed its fifty years of purely official existence to the inconvenience that living in it would have caused the wives of the potential tenants of that time. A woman always likes to feel that her house is her own, to do with as she will. A transitory tenancy of No. 10 occasions the wives of its official occupants much worry, hard work and domestic upheaval. On top of this the whole process may have to be undertaken again in no longer than a few months.

In one chapter it is impossible to do justice to so wide and important a subject as “The Women of No. 10.” This could be done adequately only in a

separate book. So here no more will be attempted than to give some impression of the influence of its women upon the story of the ancient house. And how varied in type those women have been !

Although No. 10, as we know it to-day, was not built in the Tudor times of Elizabeth Palle of the Peacock Inn, "Downing Street" must have known this lady well. Elizabeth was a hearty hostess, a buxom wench with red cheeks and loose and loudly wagging tongue. Indeed, in hearty cursing she outvied even that Royal namesake who inherited no mean vocabulary from the downright Henry. Elizabeth, of the "Peacock" was popular, as was only to be expected, and so she dispensed beer jovially to a well-thronged taproom.

A very Amazon was Elizabeth Palle, for the story goes that when any roysterer became too rowdy for her house she would throw him out into "Downing Street" without compunction for the fact that, as often as not, the victim fell into a water-filled hole or upon a heap of rotting refuse. "Downing Street" in the "good old days" of the Peacock Inn was very different from the modern street. If, for sentimental reasons, the reader wishes that it could recapture its bygone romance of comic-opera costumes and laughing oaths, he should remember that modern women would be appalled by the slightest whiff of the characteristic odour of Tudor London. If the truth is told, in those days Downing Street stank. In undertaking the task of hostess at No. 10, the wife of the Premier assumes heavy responsibility, but to-day she is at

least helped in running the house by the twentieth century's experience in sanitation.

Very different from the florid Elizabeth was Lady Knyvett, who, as has already been told, came to live in a house built upon the site of No. 10. Lady Knyvett was a charming woman whose chief interests seem to have been centred in her husband. She had considerable private means and these she did not grudge to use in the advancement of Sir Thomas's career. She took great pride in her home, and a considerable part of what was left of her income was devoted to the unofficial repair and decoration of the building, for the site of No. 10 has always been, since its marshy days, one upon which a house stood uneasily.

In these days many a woman has plenty of time for social activities. This was not so when Lady Knyvett lived. Any woman of those times who was really house proud and had the misfortune to live in a large and rambling mansion in a doubtful state of repair found that she had a whole-time job on her hands. While her Lord and Master was at Court we can picture Lady Knyvett busy with the household accounts, worried about the carpenter's bill, pacifying a servant girl who had fallen down the worn cellar steps, and interviewing the masons, bricklayers, builders and others of the trade. Her one concern is that "Knyvett House" shall be a fit dwelling for her courtier husband. The plaster must not fall off the walls or ceiling even in the servants' bedrooms. The linen must be spotless and the house as well. Nothing, from Lady

Knyvett's point of view, was too good for the house or its owner.

This affection of Lady Knyvett for "Knyvett House" throws light upon the curious grant made by King James I when he wished to compensate the couple for their various expenditures and faithful service. Doubtless before making the grant the King made enquiries and found that Lady Knyvett had provided most of the money required and that Sir Thomas would be best pleased with some favour which would benefit his wife. Thus the sixty-year posthumous lease, the ultimate consideration of the grant, seems a reasonable and kindly provision. Almost certainly Knyvett knew of the King's plans and may himself have prompted the form of the gift. He wanted his wife to continue to enjoy the house she loved, in the event of his death. But by dying almost immediately after her husband, Lady Knyvett set at naught these carefully conceived arrangements. She was a woman of strong character and must have set her mark upon the "Downing Street" of the day.

The tenancy of Mrs. Hampden, the Knyvetts' niece, is remarkable because it was the only occasion when Downing Street was occupied solely by a woman. It is unfortunate that little is known about the character and interests of this woman, or about her long and no doubt eventful occupation. As has been said already, she and her husband gave their name not only to the house, the common custom of



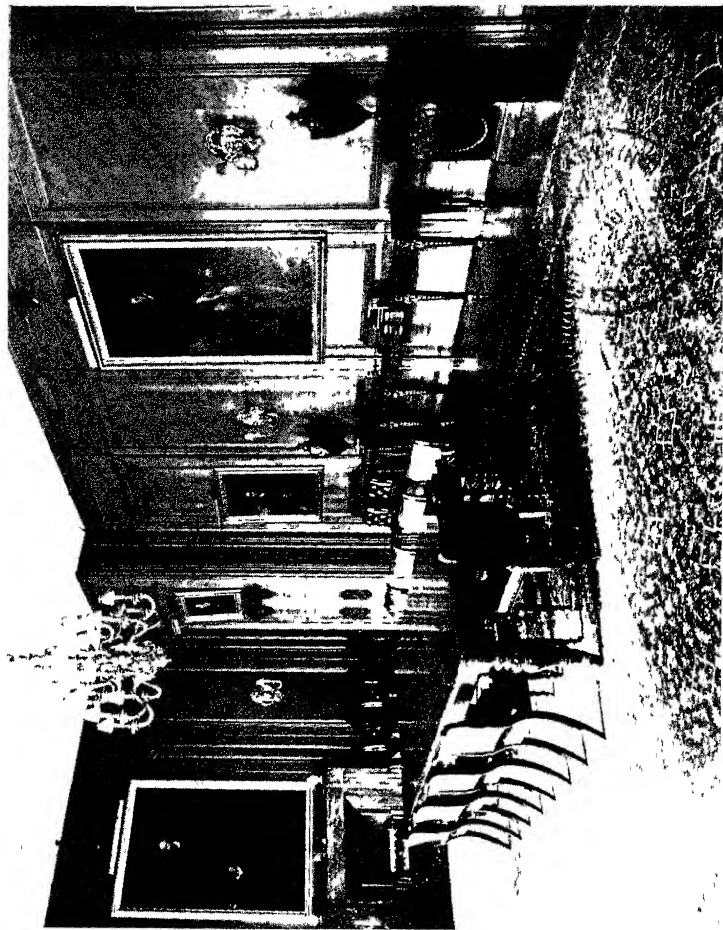
the time, but also to the lane or alley in which it was situated. Thus Downing Street is marked on maps of the time as "Hammins (Hampden) Yard."

The story of No. 10 would surely be incomplete without some allusion to the wife of the man who founded the fortunes of Downing Street. Downing himself was too strong a character to allow himself to be ruled by anyone, least of all a woman. His wife appears to have had little influence upon his life and works, beyond saying "Yes" and "No" at the right times. There is a story told of a "feast" given to Downing's tenants on his country estate. We may suppose that the part played by Mrs. Downing in this event was typical of the lady. A respectful silence seems to have been the keynote of the meal. It was broken shortly after the serving of each course by the host turning to his mother and remarking that the dish was an excellent one. The mother, having agreed, repeated the remark to the hostess, who, having endorsed the observation, addressed the assembled company with the words: "Say all, 'tis good meat (or soup, or fish, etc.)." This appears to have been a fair example of Mrs. Downing's place in the home.

By contrast with the colourless Mrs. Downing, the fourteen-year-old Lady Lichfield brings her quota of romance to the historic neighbourhood. Just as, nowadays, it is rare for anyone to think of marriage so early in life, so would it be a matter for wonder if so young a girl were to be called upon to run a big

house. Doubtless Lady Lichfield had good servants who organised the details, but she was a very capable young person, and she brought to "Downing Street" not only considerable personal beauty but a great deal of ability and wit. One can imagine the day of this young hostess—a lesson in geography followed by ordering the meals of the family and guests, then a walk in the park; a lesson in French, and a practical lesson in mathematics with the household books to work on; dinner for twelve, sacking the second footman, selecting a court dress and early to bed. Charlotte was a busy woman.

When No. 10 attained its official dignity it frequently received as a guest a woman who had much influence over the course of its history. This was Queen Caroline, wife of George II. We have already mentioned this lady and her visits to No. 10 in the days of Walpole. She was a woman of strong character and undoubtedly greatly influenced many of the statesman's decisions. One does not suppose that she was much disturbed by the indignities to which the women of the house were subjected by Walpole—such were not exceptional in those days. Not only did the Queen have to listen to language from her Minister which would shock the most broad-minded people of to-day, but Walpole never spared embarrassment to his wife and daughter. If an opportunity arose for him to crack a joke at their expense he would not hesitate to make the most intimate personal remarks about them in open company.



*H. M. Office of Works*

THE DINING-ROOM

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Romance has been no stranger to No. 10 Downing Street. We have the Knyvetts, a Darby and Joan couple ; Charlotte, passionate daughter of a passionate father ; Maria Walpole and her father's ardent young secretary. But these are all front page news. That unassuming couple, the Monsons, might go to half a column in the society news and not much more, but they certainly add their share of romance to the story of the building. Every girl who marries says that no house has the romance associated with the one she moved into on her marriage. Each article of furniture is chosen with such loving care, and each angle, alcove and nook of the house is studied so earnestly to decide what will fit and what be better where. Mrs. Monson may not be worth headlines, but her careful nature is worthy of mention. With Mrs. Monson in No. 10 the household bills were not inflated by the various functions an " official " tenant must give.

A Prime Minister's wife needs plenty of house-keeping money, but not all are experts in domestic economy. Elizabeth Grenville was one of the best housewives No. 10 has known, she took much pride in running the house efficiently. She was a most businesslike woman. The only daughter of Sir William Wyndham, she had been strictly brought up, and when she came to live in Downing Street she did much to lighten her husband's cares of office.

It is always open to argument whether a woman should take part in her husband's business activities or confine herself to the running of his house. Most

of the women who have lived in No. 10 have concerned themselves only with running the house and entertaining their husband's political friends—in itself a sufficiently heavy task. For whoever would do this well must understand more than housekeeping and the art of making herself pleasant to a variety of people; she must also know such things as the correct order of precedence; she must know just what to do and what not to do when entertaining foreign notabilities; what subjects of conversation to encourage and what to avoid.

In all these matters she will no doubt get adequate help from her husband's private secretaries, but with so much to remember the task of being No. 10's hostess is no light one. Elizabeth Grenville managed these things perfectly and frequently advised her husband. Grenville did very little of importance without first talking it over with his wife. Woman's ambition often has the strongest influence on man's career. Elizabeth Grenville was ambitious, and so Grenville succeeded.

Ambition was also strikingly present in Mrs. Robinson's character (Lady Goderich). It was very gratifying to this lady when she moved into No. 10 for four years. Already she was the wife of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but the real peak of her ambition was only reached on her second occupation of the house, as Lady Goderich, and the wife of the Prime Minister. She was a woman of taste and discrimination and assisted her husband not only in his

political career but in choosing pictures and furniture, of which he was a connoisseur.

Mrs. Dowdeswell, on the other hand, was a very different type of woman. Indeed, she was little more than incidental to the picture of her times. She took no part and probably no interest in political argument. It would be difficult to imagine her advising her husband on problems of party dissension. Nevertheless, in her own way Mrs. Dowdeswell must have been a remarkable woman. Probably her husband's attitude, in firmly refusing to avail himself of the widespread opportunities of his time for filling his pockets at the expense of the nation, was in part the result of her influence.

Mrs. Dowdeswell brought up a large family and managed to make both ends meet on a sparse income. How she succeeded in this when burdened with the cost of maintaining No. 10 and of entertaining must remain a mystery. Few people outside her own circle of intimate friends can imagine the mistress of No. 10 busily cutting and stitching an afternoon frock for herself or rompers for the youngest child, yet Mrs. Dowdeswell probably did a good deal of this work.

Had a woman like Mrs. Dowdeswell lived in No. 10 at the time of Pitt's tenancy that statesman would never have run up his enormous personal debt of £45,000. She would not have allowed him to order so lavishly for the upkeep of No. 10, regardless of whether he could afford the expense or not, and she

would not have allowed his servants to rob him. It is true that while his sister Harriet kept house for him Pitt's expenditure was kept within bounds ; but when she married, No. 10 no more knew orderly and economical housekeeping. Pitt should then have married also. Later, Lady Hester Stanhope makes her official appearance in No. 10 as Pitt's hostess for banquets and entertainments. It was she whom he sent, while he lay dying at Putney, to deputise for him at a banquet in the house, to which guests had been invited in honour of the Queen's birthday.

For many years, the period during which No. 10 was used as an office, and for some time thereafter, the house had no woman to make it her principal interest. At last there came that remarkable woman, Lady Oxford and Asquith. But the influence of Lady Oxford and of other contemporary women who have lived in No. 10—Mrs. Baldwin, Dame Lloyd George, and Miss Ishbel MacDonald—is too well known and appreciated to make discussion here necessary.

One detail of this period, however, is not generally known, and is of considerable interest. The furniture of No. 10, as supplied by the Office of Works, is ample and solid. Though old-fashioned, most of this furniture is comfortable ; but an exception to this general rule is the large bed supplied for the use of the Prime Minister. Lord Rosebery is said to have grumbled about the discomfort of this official bed, and even to have attributed to it the insomnia from which he suffered during and after his term of office. And



since his time standards of nocturnal ease have advanced considerably. So for many years now all the tenants of the house save one have brought with them their own beds.

On taking office the Premiers have far too much to occupy them politically to have leisure or inclination for domestic cares. Thus it naturally falls on the womenfolk to arrange all the details of furnishing No. 10. The usual procedure is to go over the house, decide what shall be stored and what retained, and which articles of personal furniture will serve best to make the place more like home. Generally speaking there is one article which is always brought, whether it fits in with the decorative scheme or not—the new tenant's favourite arm-chair.

This certainly happened in the cases of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Mr. Baldwin and Mr. Lloyd George. Lady Asquith, Mrs. Baldwin and Miss Ishbel MacDonald have all taken considerable trouble during their various tenancies to make the house cheerful and comfortable. Mrs. Baldwin in particular had furniture transferred to the house, both from her London residence and from her country house in Worcestershire. At her suggestion much redecoration on modern lines has been done to bring No. 10 up-to-date and make it bright.

No. 10 is the scene of much bustle and activity with each change of tenant. Sufficient furniture for ordinary needs is "officially" supplied, but few of the women who have lived in the house have been

content to leave the furnishing at that. Some of the "stock" articles are usually sent down to the cellar for storage until the next change of Government, and what is left in the rooms is readjusted to fit in with the household belongings brought by the new tenant. Some of the furniture supplied by the Office of Works is heavy and old-fashioned. A certain amount of it dates from Disraeli's days (extensive refurnishing must have been necessary after No. 10's fifty years as an office), but there are a few pieces which are considerably more ancient. There may even be furniture in the house which dates back to the year when No. 10 first became the official residence of the Prime Minister.

Most of No. 10's hostesses find considerable re-organisation necessary, in respect of cutlery, china and kitchen-ware. Many of the articles supplied are old-fashioned and unattractive. These are sometimes used for particularly official entertainments, but for private use the lady of the house generally prefers to bring her own treasured possessions.

Again, servants are a very real problem to any woman about to move into No. 10. The new mistress has no house staff officially supplied for her convenience, so she needs to engage a staff of her own, and the choice is a matter demanding thought and attention. She is allowed to take only a stated number, and, no matter how high an opinion she may have of her staff, their characters and past lives must be subject to thorough investigation. How necessary is this procedure

in the case of every servant who is to live in the house of a thousand secrets is illustrated by the fact that, a few years ago, one of the servants who was to be chosen as an inmate of No. 10 was found to have been convicted of theft. He was not allowed to live in the house. This decision may seem hard on a man who, having made one slip, finds that discrimination is made against him after he has suffered punishment ; but it will be appreciated that no avoidable chance can be taken in so important a house as No. 10.

Having chosen her servants, the mistress of No. 10 has merely begun her anxieties. When living in No. 10 the wife of the Prime Minister has to submit to official regulations ruling the occupation of the house. Moreover, she cannot know how long her tenancy will last, for this is one of the few houses which cannot be governed by any terms of lease or contract. And so, following shortly after the dislocation and annoyance of moving in, the new tenant may find that her husband is out of office and that she has the business of removal to go through again.

Furthermore, she must see that everything in the house which she has moved, or stored in the cellar, is returned to its official place. None of her possessions must be left behind, and a minute inventory of everything in the house must be checked and signed.

All sorts and conditions of men have woven their several threads into the story of No. 10, and the threads the women have spun, though fainter, fill in the background of the pattern. Only a few—instance Lady

Goderich and that dynamic personality, Lady Oxford and Asquith—have refused to be a mere background. Mrs. Dowdeswell did not obtrude herself on No. 10's political work, but she was more intimately in sympathy with the house, its cares and troubles than many others. Sarah Dashwood, that "poor, forlorn Presbyterian prude," was perhaps the most out of place of all the women of Downing Street.

Women to-day are taking an increasing part in politics. Women have ruled our country wisely from the throne. Who can be absolutely certain that we shall never, so help us, see a woman in official occupation of No. 10 Downing Street as Prime Minister of Great Britain?

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